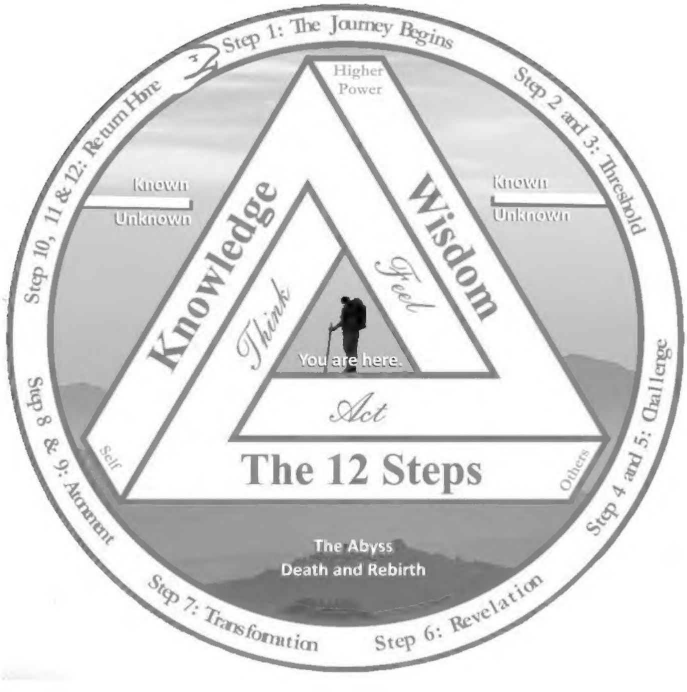
12 Steps to a Good Life

The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge and Wisdom

Part 1


Step 1: The Journey Begins
Step 2 and 3: Threshold
Step 4 and 5: Challenge
Step 6: Revelation
Step 7: Transformation
Step 8 & 9: Atonement
Step 10, 11 & 12: Return Home
Higher Power
Known
Unknown
Known
Unknown
Knowledge
Wisdom
Think
Feel
Act
You are here.
The 12 Steps
Self
Others
The Abyss
Death and Rebirth

Thomas Aletheia

Copyright © 2025 Thomas Aletheia

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9798884153455

This document, "12 Steps to a Good Life: The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge and Wisdom" and all associated intellectual property (IP) exclusively owned by this author, including manuscripts and drafts, audio and video media, related text or excerpts, web content, and derivative works, are released to the public domain on 20 September, 2031.

Disclaimer: The information provided in this book is for general informational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical, financial, psychological, or spiritual advice. The author and publisher of this book are not a doctor, financial advisor, therapist, or spiritual leader. The information contained in this book is based on the personal experiences and research of the author, and is intended to provide a starting point for readers to explore and understand these topics.

The author and publisher of this book do not make any representations or warranties of any kind, express or implied, about the completeness, accuracy, reliability, suitability, or availability with respect to the information contained in this book. Any reliance you place on such information is therefore strictly at your own risk.

In no event will the author or publisher be liable for any loss or damage including without limitation, indirect or consequential loss or damage, or any loss or damage whatsoever arising from loss of data or profits arising out of, or in connection with, the use of this book.

The views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher or any other entity. The content of this book is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease or condition.

Please consult with a qualified medical, financial, psychological, or spiritual professional before making any decisions based on the information contained here. The author and publisher of this book do not assume any responsibility for any choices or actions taken by readers based on the information contained in it.

DEDICATION

To Sunset Group, and

For Rob C., who enjoyed his journey

and reached his destination with dignity and grace;

For my younger self, who could have used a book like this,

and for everyone with the courage to explore

the terrifying and wondrous realms hidden within.

Jennifer, who helped me grow.
Larry, AA Member, and my friend for 25 years.

Sometimes you don't find what you are looking for,
because if you found it, you would stop looking
and lose everything that matters.
--TA

The website provides far more than standard companion material. It provides free access to the complete manuscript, printable forms, answer sheets, and bookmarks. It features a custom AI that lets you chat directly with the book's contents, or generate your own tailored media and learning tools. There are links to hundreds of audio and video files, meditation apps, and the option to purchase physical copies.

https://12stepstoagoodlife.com
https://12stepstoagoodlife.neocities.org

***

If you purchased or received this book as a gift and find it is not for you, pass it on to someone else. Perhaps you are the conduit by which they will find the answers they have been seeking. Give it away, donate to a library, or leave it to be found by someone who needs it. Thank you.

Contents

Part 1: Foundation 1
1.1 My Story 7
1.2 The Perennial Struggle 13
1.3 A Good Life 19
1.4 The 12 Steps 23
Part 2: 12 Steps to a Good Life 41
2.1 Step 1: Life Is Unmanageable 57
2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power 63
2.2½ The Unofficial Step 2½ 71
2.3 Step 3: Rely on My Higher Power 75
2.4 Step 4: Take an Inventory 81
2.5 Step 5: Admit What I Found 87
2.6 Step 6: Be Ready to Change 95
2.7 Step 7: Humbly Ask for Change 99
2.8 Step 8: List the Harm I Caused 103
2.9 Step 9: Make Amends Where Possible 107
2.10 Step 10: Continue My Inventory 115
2.11 Step 11: Pray and Meditate for Guidance . 119
2.12 Step 12: Make the World Better 125
About Knowledge and Wisdom 129
Part 3: Knowledge 131
3.1 Being 133
3.2 Doing 191
3.3 Body 249
3.4 Mind 289
3.5 Emotion 345
3.6 Spirit 385
3.7 Relationships 425
3.8 Finances 449
3.9 Practice and Projects 455
Part 4: Wisdom 459
4.1 Leaves of Life 463
4.2 Zen Thoughts 649
4.3 The Enchiridion 656
4.4 The Gospel of Matthew 670
4.5 The Dhammapada 709
4.6 The Tao Te Ching 728
4.7 The Book of Proverbs 743
4.8 The Gospel of Thomas 768
4.9 The Gospel of Mary 779
Final Word 782
About the Author 785
Appendix 786

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A Doctor and a Counselor
Alcoholics Anonymous
Codependents Anonymous

Sincere Gratitude
Grace

To Jennifer, who has helped me grow
and followed her vows to the letter. ☺

Special Thanks

Cheri S.

You have no idea how much you are helping me. Having someone interested and excited by what I am trying to accomplish has helped keep me motivated through the long years of completing this project. No matter what I write here, I can never fully express how grateful I am. Thank you!

Thank you to: Dr. Patrick, Christine D., Tim M.

Cover photo: Simon Berger[1]

If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

--Isaac Newton

Through the decades I have been influenced by individuals too numerous to list. In print and in person, I found brilliant minds, kind hearts, and wise souls. To all, my sincerest gratitude.

---

[1] https://www.pexels.com/photo/silhouette-of-mountains-1323550/

FOREWARD

In this insightful compendium, Thomas Aletheia distills his learning and personal insights, offering a roadmap forged from his own experiences. This book encapsulates what truly worked for him and reveals the profound journey of uncovering his authentic self.

More than just a guide, it serves as a beacon of hope, reminding us that change is possible if we are willing to embrace it. I encourage you to dive into these pages and allow this wisdom to inspire your own journey toward healing and connection.

--Maria, Recovery Counselor

12 Steps to a Good Life: The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge and Wisdom, challenges readers to identify the critical difference between knowledge and action, moving from what they think they know about themselves to truly learning who they are. It is a guidebook for daily practice and self-awareness.

Author Thomas Aletheia provides foundational, practical suggestions tailored for complicated people living in a complicated world, guiding readers toward a deeper understanding of how to manage everyday situations.

Enjoy the journey as you get to know *you.*

--Cheri S., AA Member

Discover a transformative path to personal growth in 12 Steps to a Good Life. Modeled after the proven 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and structured around the powerful framework of Joseph Campbell's "A Hero's Journey," this book offers a profound blueprint for self-discovery. By masterfully weaving together ancient wisdom teachings and modern psychology into one cohesive text, the author guides readers through a universal process of awakening, transformation, and ultimate fulfillment. Whether you are seeking healing, purpose, or a deeper understanding of yourself, this book is your essential guide for the journey ahead.

--Tim M., AA Member

Part 1: Foundation

You probably know everything here, but can you live it?

--Kim, AA Member

When things change inside you, things change around you.

--Unknown

A Good Life

We seek peace, fulfillment, and meaning in life. These natural gifts are available to everyone. They come to us from something greater than ourselves. Although they are freely given, they come only as the result of living a good life.

The more we seek peace and meaning, as individuals and as a society, the more difficult they are to find. The world spins faster as social, economic, and technological changes accelerate. Predictions of change cannot prepare us for change itself. So, we tighten our grip on the familiar and comfortable, hoping a future calamity will pass us by. We cling to the rail of a sinking ship as the water rises higher.

We blame parents, God, or the world for our misfortunes. Trapped by our thoughts, we are prisoners of circumstance. Immobilized by our beliefs, we suffocate in tiny rigid boxes. Declining responsibility, we are crushed by the weight of the past. The prisons we must escape are self-made. The chains that bind us are forged by our own hands.

Self-righteous anger, judging others, and placing blame does not change anything. Such tactics only deepen our anger and judgment, making unhappiness inevitable. Some prefer bitter to sweet and anger to joy. It is their normal state. For them, life has no meaning but misery.

As Viktor Frankl wrote, "The meaning of life is to give life meaning."[1] Finding meaning is a personal journey, no single book or set of instructions fits everyone. Here, you will find practical advice for building a good life, with timeless wisdom to guide and support you in your unique journey.

A good life has meaning that is free of magical thinking and feel-good platitudes. It is knowing how to self-reflect, make decisions, and deal with grief, pain, and hardship. You must work for this change. It will not be immediate, and probably not what you imagined. But it will be real, and reality is the sole arbiter of what works and what does not.

---

[1] Psychology Today, Website, retrieved 20 January 2020, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/mans-search-meaning.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide

I am neither optimist nor pessimist. I am a realist. The very existence of consciousness in a vast universe leads me to be generally upbeat. The watchmaker may be blind,[2] but he is not cruel.

Foun[Part 1-01] **Assumptions**

I make some assumptions going forward, and you should know what they are.[3] They evolved over time and through experience. Practical but not provable, I believe my life is better because of them. I submit them as examples and ideas for constructing a worldview of your own.

The universe is generally friendly.
The world you know is part of a much larger universe.
There are things you do not know and will never know.
People are innately good.
You are unique and valuable.
You are part of something greater than yourself.
You cannot change what happens, only your reaction to it.
It is never too late to change.
Anyone can learn the skills needed to live a good life.
Living well is learned and practiced.
Learning new skills requires commitment.
You live well through clear thinking and good habits.
Happiness and meaning arise from living well.
You can live a happy and meaningful life.
You are loved, and all is well.

Concurrent with these assumptions, four simple ideas lay the foundation for everything that follows.

Foun[Part 1-02] **Four Simple Ideas**

1. We are motivated by needs.[4] As biological organisms, we have real and specific needs that must be met. These include air, food, water, clothing, shelter, and intimacy. And as humans, we also need to belong, be accepted, and be loved. We have higher needs as well. We need to improve, grow, and even transcend our current state.

2. Our worldview distorts our needs.[5] Our needs are filtered through layers of unconscious[7] beliefs and attitudes. These have accumulated through years of life experiences. Many of them are core beliefs we received from parents, caretakers, and society when we were young. Beliefs and attitudes define our priorities and boundaries. When our needs are distorted by our beliefs, we do not know what is real.

---

2 Ref to Dawkins, Richard, "The Blind Watchmaker", 1986, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blind_Watchmaker
3 Some of these are from Louise L. Hay, "What I Believe And Deep Relaxation", 2005, Hay House Publishing; and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hsmqtY3h6Y
4 See Knowledge-Being, Basic Needs Inventory
5 Wikipedia, "Allegory of the Cave"; John Bradshaw, "Bradshaw On: The Family", 1988.

3. New knowledge and wisdom can only come from outside our current worldview.[6]

> *No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that created it.*
>
> --Melissa "Scare" Croden, MMA Fighter

It is hard to think out of the box when we are in the box. The "box" is our set of thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. The only thing we can see, the only solutions we can find, are those that are already in the box with us. We must leave our comfort zone and explore solutions outside of our current belief system.[7] We must find a way out of the box.

4. A truth exists that is both immanent and transcendent.[8] Ineffable in nature, it can only be understood at a deeply personal level. It is experiential, not conceptual. So, although it is available to everyone who is open to it, it is not transferable from one person to another. It cannot be written or spoken. It can only be understood by each person through their own experience. Acceptance of this truth results in fundamental changes to your worldview.

These ideas are expanded in the sections that follow.

A friend of mine once said, "People only change when it is more painful not to."[9] There is truth to this statement, but there is more to it. Pain results from a mismatch between reality and our perception of it. In other words, we experience discomfort when we believe and act as though one thing is true, but the truth is something else.

For example, if you walk into a closed glass door you believe is open, you hurt your nose. If someone tosses a basketball when you are not looking, you get a bump on your head. If you are betrayed by a friend, you feel hurt and disappointed. So, the discovery of a mismatch between reality and your perceptions can cause change: put a decal on the glass door, pay attention while playing basketball, and be more cautious in choosing friends.

Foun[Part 1-03] **Three Scenarios for Change**

Three kinds of experiences can motivate change:

1. You crash into reality. This happens because of actions you take or do not take. Examples: walking through a glass door, thinking you can fly, driving while impaired, or clinging to unrealistic expectations. These are usually events or behaviors you can control but do not.

---

[6] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero With A Thousand Faces", 1949, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero%27s_journey

[7] Luc De Brabandere and Alan Iny, "Thinking in New Boxes: A New Paradigm for Business Creativity", 2013, Blinkist Synopsis

[8] Ken Wilbur, "The Spectrum of Consciousness", 1977; Alduous Huxley, "The Perennial Philosophy", 1947.

[9] Thank you, Cammie, I never forgot this lesson.

2. Reality crashes into you. These are events that happen to you, such as illness, accidents, or economic downturns. Sometimes these events are preventable, sometimes not. In either case, once the event is imminent, it is beyond your control.

3. You participate in reality. Where the first two situations can have catastrophic results, the third is healthy and proactive. Think of an eagle gliding on invisible currents, or a surfer riding a wave. You do not create or change reality; you become partners with it.

> *Emotional sickness is avoiding reality at any cost.*
> *Emotional health is facing reality at any cost.*
>
> --M. Scott Peck

I present methods to evaluate the validity of your perceptions of reality and make suitable changes where necessary. To understand and follow through on these methods requires courage and persistence. We do not always do the right or intelligent thing even, or especially, when life comes crashing down around us. Anger and fear often hide behind denial and then fuel destructive behavior.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life are a practical guide to living well and making the world better. They will not immunize you against illness, ward off misfortune, or magically transform you. But over time, you will begin taking better care of yourself and making better choices. Better self-care and better choices are the result of more realistic thoughts and feelings.

Thoughts and feelings are the foundation of life. Everything you do or do not do is based upon your reaction to thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings are tightly intertwined, and how you deal with your thoughts and feelings determines how you deal with life.

The Knowledge section contains a wealth of information on intelligently recognizing and dealing with thoughts and feelings, behavior, and life events. The Wisdom section is a collection of some of the greatest spiritual and philosophical works ever written. By working the 12 Steps and making use of Knowledge and Wisdom, you will have a toolbox and guidebook on how to live a good life through your own Hero's Journey.

The only requirements are desire and persistence. You will not learn how to work miracles, but you will learn how to be open to them. Be patient with yourself. Do not quit before the miracle happens.[10]

How to Use This Book

Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

---

[10] A phrase often used in AA meetings.

Not everyone learns life lessons from books, but they have been a primary way to share knowledge for centuries. I have seen people profoundly changed by reading and applying new ideas. This book is meant to be read many times; each time you read it you will find new insights and make new connections. It is not an ending to your journey; it is a beginning.

How to Read the Book: Read at your own pace, either systematically or choose a page at random. Ask questions, make notes, think critically, and draw conclusions based on evidence. Highlight meaningful passages and write the date in the margin to track your growth.

An elegant, though archaic practice, is to keep a "commonplace book".[11] This is a separate notebook of anything you want to remember. Over time, you begin noticing life lessons not only from this book, but in your daily life, as well. Writing these by hand, along with your own impressions and interpretations, helps you retain it. The added benefit is that these notebooks eventually become your own personal archive of knowledge and wisdom.

How to Read the Steps: The Steps work best when approached in an orderly, sequential fashion. Reading and working the Steps is discussed extensively in the introduction to Part 2. Continue reading the Steps any time as a review or further insight. Always know what Step you are on.

How to Read Knowledge: The Knowledge section discusses problems and solutions for fundamental areas of your life. These categories roughly coincide with those found in self-help and life coaching literature.[12] In this section you will find basic information to progress in each of the eight areas discussed: Being, Doing, Body, Mind, Emotion, Spirit, Relationships, and Finances. They are not exhaustive, and I am not an expert in these fields.

When reading the Knowledge section, you can...
Read it straight through.
Browse casually until you find something interesting.
Turn to a specific section where your life needs attention.

Your best use of Knowledge will be a combination of all of these.

How to Read Wisdom: Approach the texts in Wisdom with an open and curious mind. Challenge what you do not understand. Make connections where you do. Find your own path and pace. Conduct your own research. Face apparent contradictions squarely and question them thoroughly. Study the context (passages before and after) and draw your own conclusions. There are no right or wrong answers.

You can approach Wisdom as a scholar, a spiritual seeker, or both. Choose random texts or practice Divine Reading.[13] Research alternate interpretations. Memorize quotes and passages that appeal to you.

---

[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonplace_book
[12] Jeni Mumford, "Life Coaching for Dummies", 2007, p155
[13] See Knowledge, Spirit, Divine Reading

Each entry in "Leaves of Life" suggests additional reading. These are designated by an abbreviated section name and a number in brackets (for example Know[3.1-22] and TaoT[039]). A corresponding designation is found in the referenced text. (Knowledge 3.1 Being, 22 and Tao Te Ching, 39). While the Wisdom references have an obvious beginning and ending, the Knowledge references are more in the nature of reminders to review important information, and may overlap or leave gaps. They are not substitutes for reading the rest of the book.

Following these suggestions allows you to annually review the 12 Steps, the most important points of Knowledge, and all of Wisdom. Within a year, you will have absorbed some of the greatest teachings in human history.

Connecting Everything

As you spend time with the material, you will see overlaps between the Steps, the Hero's Journey, Knowledge, and Wisdom; all provide guidance to living a good life. While not an exact correlation, many ideas repeat, and recognizing these connections helps in applying them.

For example, thoughts, as motivation for behavior, play a key role in Steps 4 and 10. Teachings on this appear in *The Enchiridion* and *Dhammapada*, while *Knowledge, Doing, and Mind* offer techniques to manage them.

In the final edit, most of the formatting was removed to let you decide what is important. Think of the text as a self-development canvas, where you can highlight and annotate it to make it your own. The book forms a cohesive whole, revealing to you personally that you are part of something greater, you matter, and you can live a good life.

In his most famous work, “On the Consolation of Philosophy”,[14] Boethius (c. 480-524 C.E.)[15] considers the great questions of life from a prison cell, while awaiting trial and execution. In a conversation with Lady Philosophy, Boethius decides he must invoke "the Father of all things" to aid him in his search for the "highest good". Read it as a preface to your daily readings. It is a beautiful reminder that you and the path that you follow are One.

Foun[Part 1-04] Boethius’s Prayer (Invocation to the Highest Good)

Oh, grant, almighty Father,
Grant us on reason's wing to soar aloft
To heaven's exalted height; grant us to see
The fount of good; grant us, the true light found,
To fix our steadfast eyes in vision clear On Thee.
Disperse the heavy mists of earth,
And shine in Thine own splendour.
For Thou art the true serenity and perfect rest
Of every pious soul--to see Thy face,
The end and the beginning--
One the guide, the traveller, the pathway, and the goal.

---

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Consolation_of_Philosophy
[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boethius

1.1 My Story

I am on a voyage of discovery. I search for those of you who will go on a great adventure... if you are one of those audacious few willing to dare and then to share... come with me.

--William H. Danforth

Fixing Myself

The first self-help book I recall reading was "I Dare You." It was written in 1931 by William H. Danforth. I read it as a child in the 1960s. I still have a copy of it. It is a valued memento of my youth. Since then, I have read countless other self-help books. Some were ridiculous in the claims they made. Some were helpful.

Writing this, I am 61 years old. A few days ago, I pondered 50 years of trying to fix myself. The effort was not unwarranted. I had issues that needed attention.

That said, I wondered when I would be content with life. Given the time I have left, I would like to wake up one morning and say, "I am happy with who I am." At some point we all deserve that self-acceptance.[1]

Many of my goals, and the obstructions from achieving them, are recurring. I would like to exercise a little more, lose a few pounds, and practice more on my guitar. I would like to be less angry and anxious, and more patient and understanding. I would like to meditate regularly.

Thinking of these goals, I questioned my motivation and willpower. I wanted to fix the flaws in my makeup that held me back. I wondered if I deserved to be content and happy.

It occurred to me that I had entertained these thoughts many times. In 50 years, one can think a lot of thoughts. I was shocked at how often I had been down this path. I realized I was not changing anything. I saw the symptoms, not the problems.

My desires and goals are not unrealistic, and I am sure yours are the same. But what we want is rarely what we need. This is the heart of the self-improvement dilemma. Ideas of what we should do, or should be, camouflage and twist what we need. Our true potential is hidden, and our growth stunted by erroneous ideas of who we are and who we are supposed to be. Our desires are a mashup of internal drives, social pressures, and expectations. We idealize and elevate them to goals, confusing them with what is good for us.

---

[1] Mark Manson, author of "The Subtle Art of not Giving a F*ck", says that self-acceptance is the goal of self-awareness. https://markmanson.net/self-awareness

1.1 My Story

Rules and Expectations

Early on, I gauged my success against expectations from childhood. But lessons learned in youth are often inconsistent. I internalized arbitrary and contradictory standards. As an adult, I chased dreams, fairy tales, and ideals of behavior that were unrealistic.

Just as you did, I received a set of rules and beliefs in early childhood that influenced my thoughts and behavior. These rules and beliefs are absorbed from a young age and initially come from parents and caregivers. They form a model of the world around us. They tell us who we are and our place in the world. They tell us what to do and not do.

Children are blank slates, trying to incorporate their experiences into a coherent whole.[2] When these are inconsistent or conflicting, it creates a rift in the child's worldview. This is not some generic or bland academic statement. The messages we absorb as children become the rules and beliefs that affect us for life. We do not have to receive these rules and beliefs explicitly. They are picked up at an unconscious level through observation and experience.

Two rules I learned as a child were "Be smart," and "Be good." My path to acceptance and love was to be a good and smart little boy. These were two of the first (of many) masks I wore. Failure to be good and smart caused anxiety. When I did not live up to these standards, I faked it.

I inherited many such rules and beliefs. Especially troublesome were those that were inconsistent or contradictory. Many of them invoked fear to facilitate control. For example, I learned that God loves me unconditionally, but if I sin, I can be burned alive forever. Then I learned I was born in sin and will always be a sinner. It is no wonder that I feared the whims of a vengeful God from angry people dressed in black.

I learned if I am not smart, I am stupid. If I am not good, I am bad. I am a failure, worthless and unloved. I am sickly and small. I have a big head and bad teeth. I may be seen but not heard. I am too big for my britches. My feelings do not matter. I do not matter. Sometimes these were verbal statements, sometimes not. For a child, being ignored, dismissed, and shamed is a statement in itself.[3]

I learned cultural values from advertising and media. Impressionable and bereft of social skills, I absorbed life lessons from books, TV, music, and movies. Media, such as it was at the time, shaped my views on success, relationships, and behavior. Distorted and oversimplified, media messages felt like truth to a young mind. I internalized these lessons, unconsciously arranging them alongside those I learned at home and at school.

---

[2] Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, and others used the phrase “tabula rasa”. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabula_rasa

[3] Bradshaw, "Bradshaw: On the Family", 1988, p3

Broken Worldviews

I later learned that this set of implicit beliefs became my worldview.[4] It filtered my thoughts and influenced my actions for decades. It was truth for me. Only after years of self-examination did I learn to verbalize some of the unconscious rules I lived by. (See Worldviews p. 135)

About life:
Responsible people find happiness and success.
Adventurous rebels find happiness and success.
Follow the rules.
Rules are made to be broken.
Rich people are selfish and unhappy.
Poor people are virtuous.
Go to college to get a good job and make money.
Educated people are "book smart," with no common sense.
Do not show feelings. Do not ask for help.

About love:
I am not worthy of love unless I pretend to be someone else.
Pretty girls are good. If they are bad, they are misunderstood.
Good girls love bad boys.
Every pretty girl is a princess, and every princess needs to be rescued.
There is only one soul mate for me, ordained by fate.
If I love someone, I can save them.
They see my love by how much I suffer.[5]
When I suffer enough, they will love me in return.

About success:
If I never give up, my dreams will come true.
I will only be happy if I follow my dreams.
I can have anything if I want it enough and believe.
Success is achieved by risking everything.
If I think success, I will be successful.
If I think failure, I will fail.
I can achieve anything I can imagine.
Like attracts like.[6]
When I fail, I did not try hard enough or believe enough.

There are many more. I am embarrassed to write these things and lay them bare, but if my story is not honest it is not worth telling. These rules and beliefs do not operate at the forefront of consciousness. Many of them are completely contradictory. I had no checklist of crazy to consult each day. The list lies below awareness. It instantiates before every thought, decision, and action. The rules and beliefs filter every perception, color every emotion, and shape every thought.

---

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldview
[5] Offspring, "Self-Esteem", 1994, "The more you suffer, the more… [you] care."
[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_attraction_(New_Thought)

1.1 My Story

As I had my rules and beliefs, so do you. Yours may be more, or less, maladaptive than mine. You may or may not be aware of them. They are hammered into us when we are young. Through repetition, they define us. This is the human condition. Perhaps it is the original sin.[7]

Parents and caregivers rarely set out to make children miserable. There is no evil conspiracy to destroy lives. It is a blind cycle. Adults are hurtful to children because they were hurt as children.[8]

As an aggregate of individuals working in concert, society plays a part in childhood. Some members of society are damaged. Most are either well-meaning or pretend to be: Legislators make laws. Sellers sell stuff. Teachers teach. Preachers preach. Peers accept or ostracize.

Society promises to fix us and solve our problems. We are trained and conditioned to be a specific type of person in a certain segment of society. And we believe… I believed.

I tried to be what I thought I was supposed to be. Unrealistic ideals made everything complicated. Internal contradictions made each day a tribulation. Fear and shame were my companions. I tried to live up to my expectations. Inevitably, I failed.

I was lonely, angry, and afraid, but I did not know why. I could not form or maintain relationships because I did not know how. I had no sense of self because I did not know who I was. I did not know how to live or conduct myself. I faked conformity. My life was a sham. I had no idea of what my problems were or how to get better.

I lacked knowledge of happiness and contentment. I was ignorant of my own human needs. I did not realize that my thoughts and feelings did not represent reality. I did not know that my ideas about myself, other people, and the world, were tragically mistaken.

Perhaps the most surprising thing, looking back on those years, was how completely out of touch I was with, not just myself, but reality. Nor did I realize the extent of the gaps in my understanding or the errors of my thoughts. I lived completely inside my own head, awash in turbulent emotions and desperate for some meaning in life.

In my middle and late teens, I discovered alcohol, which seemed to solve all my problems. When drinking, I could relax and talk to people. I felt good. The shame and crushing anxiety were gone. I drank for 27 years, give or take a bit of sober sanity here and there. For the most part, it was an endless downward spiral of spiritual, emotional, and psychological degeneration. Imagine the terror of falling down a hole to the center of the earth; that was my daily, unrelenting, mental state.

---

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Original_sin

[8] Don Carter, "Thawing Childhood Abandonment Issues", 1995, Kindle Edition, in Chapter 2, the section A Word About Blame.

Hitting Bottom to Change

I will not describe the depth of my miserable experiences, or list the unsavory details of a failed life. I will say only that my thoughts and behavior were out of control. I wore depression like a black coat on a winter day. I flirted with suicide, my best friend and final comfort.

I finally hit the bottom of a deep well of despair.[9] In that dark night of the soul,[10] through the broken shell of a shattered ego, I glimpsed a spark of sanity. I was forced to see reality more clearly. I confronted my deepest fears and saw myself with brutal clarity. Though I did not fully understand it at the time, this experience carried the seed of a spiritual awakening. It was a fragile promise that things could be different. That seed would grow slowly, painfully, into a new way of living.

The changes were not swift, but they were profound. Although drinking was a serious problem for me, I got sober when I was 43. I quit smoking a year later. Eleven years after that, relationship issues nearly wrecked my life. I now enjoy more honest, open, and rewarding relationships. I am far from perfect, but I am better.

Desire for Change

After these changes, however, I was still stuck on smaller issues. The normal problems of living were a mystery. I quit drinking but could not lose five pounds. I stopped smoking but still procrastinated. Fear was gone but anxiety was not. Less rage is still rage. Comfort is not contentment.

The answer is in how I approached these problems. When I made significant changes, I had significant issues. For radical dysfunction, I needed radical change. I used tools that worked because I could not afford to fail. They allowed me to change my thoughts and behavior. In less demanding situations, I fell back on willpower and self-criticism. We cling to these tools, despite knowing they do not work.

The lesson I eventually learned is that I can use the same tools for gentle change as I did for big changes in the past. The tools of radical change are the same tools that work every day. They work in every situation. They are the basis of living a profound and authentic life.

In simple terms, unhappiness results when our perceptions do not match reality. We think reality is one thing, but it is something else. The tools I present help you see reality as it is and accept yourself as you are. Then you can decide what, how, and most importantly, if and why you want to change.

The single greatest discovery of my life was the realization that I was causing my own misery. I was shocked and angry when I finally got it. My thoughts and beliefs were betraying me. I was solely responsible for nearly all of the problems that plagued me.[11] I had to find a way to think differently, in some radical and unfathomable way. I had to change from the inside, out.

---

[9] Called "hitting bottom" in recovery; different for everyone, never pleasant or pretty.

[10] https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1196551

[11] All that pain was unnecessary. I could have been happy. So can you.

Tools for Change

Fundamental internal change is integral to all the world's great spiritual traditions.[12] It is a core concept of modern psychology.[13] It is the foundation of modern 12 Step groups.[14] And the only way to make this change was to embark on a journey into a very dark place: myself.[15] I was truly terrified! It was only through this journey that I found the knowledge and wisdom I needed to start getting better.

Many years after those initial, stumbling steps, I sat down to codify what I had learned. I thought that, in a book, I could always remind myself of those insights and truths I had learned at such great cost. As a secondary goal, I wanted to use my experiences to help others live a better life.

Writing the Book

Writing is an acquired skill for which great persistence is required. It is tedious work for me. But as a sculptor's art is revealed by his chisel, the endless tapping of keys finally revealed a book taking shape. Two incidents helped me arrive at the final format you have here.

I have a memory of sitting on the floor, at 16 or 17, with a circle of self-help books around me. I wanted to somehow integrate that knowledge and wisdom into a more useful and accessible format. Recalling this, it dawned on me that I have had knowledge and wisdom available to me for decades, but I failed to act on it. I was always a seeker, but never a finder.[16]

The second incident occurred because my wife defers to me in matters of technology. I am not a tech genius; I simply have an interest in gadgets. On one occasion, I bought an extremely underpowered PC for her. I thought it would do everything she "needed." She tried to make it work, but this computer could barely boot itself up. Frustrated, she told me to get her the computer "I would want for myself." A simple, yet elegant solution.

I wrote this book for myself, the book I have always wanted to read. Popular or not, I will make at least one sale, my own copy. You are holding it now, and I hope reading it helps you as much as writing it helped me.

I write in the autumn of my years. Relieved of the compulsion to self-destruct, life is kind. I wander the paths of wisdom. I collect knowledge from learned sources. I have a philosophy of life. I sense a spiritual dimension. Now I want to share this adventure with you.

If I had this book in my youth, perhaps my life would have been different, less searching, more living. I would certainly have been kinder to myself and more considerate of others. But as in the classic time travel paradox, if I had this book in my youth, I would have no reason to write it now.

---

[12] See Knowledge-Spirit

[13] See Knowledge-Mind

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alcoholics_Anonymous

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero%27s_journey#Belly_of_the_Whale

[16] Professor Laurie Santos, "The GI Joe Fallacy," Coursera & Yale, "The Science of Well Being"; knowledge alone does not change your thinking and behavior.

1.2 The Perennial Struggle

In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost.

--Dante Alighieri, Inferno

No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell.

--Carl Jung

What's Wrong with Me?

Since childhood, even my earliest memories reflected a loneliness, dissatisfaction, and anxiety that I could not define. I always felt as if I were searching for something, some missing piece, some answer just out of reach. It was not tied to any specific event or circumstance. It was just there, always, an undercurrent running under and through everything, shaping the way I saw the world and my place in it.

No matter what I did, whether in or out of relationships, or how many goals I achieved, that feeling was there. Sometimes it was a dull ache, other times a sharp, unbearable sense of emptiness. I wondered if other people felt it too, this invisible weight, this quiet discontent. Was it normal? Was something wrong with me? Or was this simply part of being human?

I tried to quiet that aching chaos. I chased distractions, accomplishments, relationships, and temporary highs. I drank a lot. (Did I say I drank a lot?) I smoked marijuana. I took a few pills. And sex… of course. Sometimes, for a moment, it felt like I had found it, the thing that would finally fill the void, that hole in my soul. But always, the feeling returned, unchanged. It was as if I were walking the same road, wearing different shoes, yet always on the same downward spiral toward self-destruction.

The Problem: The Perennial Struggle

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

--Henry David Thoreau

On close examination, late in life, I finally realized this was not a continuous series of distinct problems. It was not something to be fixed or cured (nor can it be). I call it "the Perennial Struggle." It is the deep, lifelong tension that exists within every person. It is the enduring inner conflict that runs through every human life. The pull between light and shadow. Between desire and fear. Between who we are and who we want to be.

For years, I believed I was alone in my pain. But the truth is, everyone has their own version of the Perennial Struggle. It just shows itself in different ways. It might be fear of failure, longing for connection, control issues, depression, anxiety, or the endless search for meaning. It wears many faces, but at its core, it is the same: an inescapable part of the human experience.

The question, then, is not "How do I get rid of this?" but rather "How do I work with it?" Instead of drowning in it, maybe I can learn to swim. That is the essence of this book! It is an answer, not a cure, to the Perennial Struggle. By understanding the nature of the struggle and using the tools of the 12 Steps to a Good Life and The Hero's Journey, you learn to adapt and thrive, rather than be consumed by it.

If you ever felt this unnamable tension, this quiet, persistent ache, know that you are not broken, and you are not alone. The Perennial Struggle is not a curse, but a path. And by learning to walk it, you move toward wisdom, growth, and transformation. You give yourself permission to be human!

Every person eventually confronts an unsettling truth: no matter how much you achieve or grow; certain struggles never completely disappear. These deep, lifelong conflicts shape your thoughts, emotions, and actions, often without you realizing it. Unlike fleeting problems, this struggle is not external or temporary. It shapes how you think and act until you learn to recognize it for what it is. It appears through recurring patterns of dissatisfaction, self-doubt, and internal conflict.

Know[1.2-01] **Recognizing the Perennial Struggle**

You may not always see the deeper struggle at play, but you experience it through persistent frustrations, repeating patterns, and the feeling that something is not quite right. A career struggle might mask a deeper battle with self-worth. Relationship failures may stem from the tension between craving intimacy and fearing it. The struggle never disappears; it only changes form. Some of its most common patterns include:

Recurring Struggles & Patterns: The same problems, failed relationships, self-sabotage, dissatisfaction, keep reappearing, pointing to unresolved internal conflicts.[1]

Deep-Seated Frustrations: Even when life seems successful, you feel restless, as though something essential is still missing.[2]

Unmet Needs & Existential Emptiness: A vague but persistent sense that something important remains unfulfilled, even if you cannot name it.[3]

Self-Sabotage: Acting against your own best interests, whether through procrastination, destructive habits, or pushing people away, without fully understanding why.[4]

Emotional Triggers: Overreacting to small events, feeling inexplicable anger, sadness, or fear, signals of deeper wounds beneath the surface.[5]

---

[1] Jung, C. G., Modern Man in Search of a Soul,1933

[2] Maslow, A. H., Motivation and Personality, 1954

[3] Frankl, V. E., Man's Search for Meaning, 1946

[4] Freud, S., Beyond the Pleasure Principle, 1920

[5] Beck, A. T., Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders, 1976

Fear of Change & Growth: Resisting opportunities, relationships, or experiences that might lead to transformation, even when you know they're necessary.[6]

Overcompensation & Perfectionism: Trying to prove your worth through achievement, control, or external validation, yet never feeling complete.[7]

Avoidance & Numbing: Distracting yourself with work, entertainment, addictions, or mindless habits to escape discomfort or anxiety.[8]

Inner Conflict: Feeling torn between opposing desires, values, or identities; longing for freedom yet fearing uncertainty, wanting connection yet resisting vulnerability.[9]

Comparison & Envy: Measuring your worth against others, leading to resentment, inadequacy, or an endless chase for approval.[10]

Regret & Rumination: Obsessing over past mistakes, missed opportunities, or what *could have been*, keeping you trapped in the past.[11]

Lack of Boundaries: Struggling to say no, feeling responsible for others' emotions, or allowing people to take advantage of your kindness.[12]

Imposter Syndrome: Feeling like a fraud, fearing that others will "find out" you're not as competent or worthy as they believe.[13]

Guilt & Shame: Carrying unresolved emotions from the past that distort your self-worth and limit your growth.[14]

Chronic Indecision: Fear of making the "wrong" choice, leading to paralysis and endless overthinking.[15]

Need for Control: Trying to predict, plan, or dictate uncertain outcomes, often at the cost of peace and flexibility.[16]

Fear of Rejection: Avoiding vulnerability or suppressing your true self to prevent abandonment or criticism.[17]

Helplessness & Victimhood: Feeling as though external forces dictate your fate, leading to resentment and inaction.[18]

---

[6] Bridges, W., Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, 1980
[7] Adler, A., Understanding Human Nature, 1927
[8] Maté, G., In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction, 2008
[9] Yalom, I. D., Existential Psychotherapy, 1980
[10] Festinger, L., A Theory of Social Comparison Processes, 1954
[11] Kahneman, D., Thinking, Fast and Slow, 2011
[12] Mellody, P., Facing Codependence: What It Is, Where It Comes From…, 1989
[13] Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A., The Impostor Phenomenon in High…, 1978
[14] Brown, B., The Gifts of Imperfection, 2010
[15] Schwartz, B., The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less, 2004
[16] Rotter, J. B., Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement, 1966
[17] Bowlby, J., Attachment and Loss, 1969
[18] Seligman, M. E. P., Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death, 1975

Resistance to Forgiveness: Holding onto resentment, past grievances, or betrayals, even when they continue to harm you.[19]

Existential Anxiety: Wrestling with uncertainty, purpose, and meaning, feeling overwhelmed by the vastness of life's unknowns.[20]

These struggles are not weaknesses; they are part of the human experience. By recognizing them, you take the first step toward working through them instead of being controlled by them.

Know[1.2-02] **Core Struggles of the Human Experience**

While every person's experience is unique, the Perennial Struggle tends to take universal forms. These struggles have been explored in philosophy, psychology, and mythology for centuries. Here are some examples:

Love and Intimacy: You long for deep connection, yet vulnerability often feels like a trap. The experience of being truly seen by another can create both intimacy and a loss of personal freedom.[21] Early childhood bonds shape how you approach relationships, influencing whether you seek closeness or push it away.[22] This tension plays out in patterns of fleeting relationships, commitment struggles, and the constant need for validation.[23]

Identity and Authenticity: The lifelong quest to "find yourself" is complicated because you are always evolving. Life is a process of becoming, yet you may struggle with imposter syndrome, constant reinvention, or the feeling of being an outsider.[24] The development of identity is an ongoing conflict, making the search for your true self a continuous challenge.[25]

Control and Power: The struggle between dominance and surrender shapes much of your behavior. The drive to impose order on the world is often fueled by a response to past unpredictability or chaos.[26] Perfectionism, micromanaging, and distrust in others may feel like ways to maintain stability, yet they also prevent true peace and adaptability.[27]

Fear and Insecurity: You are caught between the fear of failure and the fear of success. Suffering often comes from perception, yet your inner critic, shaped by past failures, can paralyze you.[28] This leads to avoidance, self-sabotage, and a constant need for reassurance, trapping you in a cycle of doubt that keeps you from growth.[29]

---

[19] Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P., Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope, 2000
[20] Kierkegaard, S., The Concept of Anxiety, 1844
[21] Sartre, J.-P., Being and Nothingness, 1943
[22] Bowlby, J., Attachment and Loss, 1969
[23] Ainsworth, M. D. S., Patterns of Attachment, 1978
[24] Kierkegaard, S., The Sickness Unto Death, 1849
[25] Erikson, E. H., Childhood and Society, 1950
[26] Nietzsche, F., Beyond Good and Evil, 1886
[27] Kets de Vries, M. F. R., The Leadership Mystique, 2001
[28] Epictetus, Discourses, c. 108 CE
[29] Leahy, R. L., The Worry Cure, 2005

Meaning and Purpose: The search for significance is one of life's most enduring struggles. Purpose is not something you find but something you create, yet a sense of disconnection from meaning can lead to existential depression.[30] This often manifests as chronic dissatisfaction, endless goal-seeking, and the fear that you are wasting your time on pursuits that ultimately do not matter.[31]

Fear of Death and Dissolution: The undeniable truth of impermanence shapes everything you do. Mortality gives urgency to your life, yet much of what you do may be an unconscious attempt to escape the reality of your own end.[32] This struggle can manifest as workaholism, an obsession with legacy, or reckless behavior meant to defy the inevitable.[33]

Belonging and Alienation: You yearn to be part of something greater, yet you fear the loss of individuality. Social existence creates tension; other people can feel like both a source of connection and a form of confinement.[34] Exclusion wounds you on a primal level, making loneliness and the fear of rejection difficult to escape.[35] This struggle often leads to a cycle of craving community while resisting conformity.[36]

Freedom and Responsibility: You desire total freedom, yet you struggle with the burden of responsibility. With autonomy comes the unsettling realization that you alone are responsible for shaping your life.[37] This paradox can lead to indecision, avoidance of commitments, and anxiety over past choices, as the pressure to make the "right" decision becomes overwhelming.[38]

Justice and Forgiveness: You wrestle with the tension between wanting fairness and the need to let go. Clinging to past grievances can create suffering, yet true freedom comes from forgiveness.[39] This struggle often manifests as obsessive moral outrage, difficulty moving past betrayal, and self-righteous indignation that traps you in cycles of bitterness.[40]

Chaos and Order: You need structure, yet you resist rigidity. Too much control can feel suffocating, while too little creates instability.[41] Your brain craves predictability, but an overly rigid life can lead to stagnation.[42] Finding balance between the two is essential for growth and adaptability.

---

30 Frankl, V. E., Man's Search for Meaning, 1946

31 Yalom, I. D., Existential Psychotherapy, 1980

32 Heidegger, M., Being and Time, 1927

33 Becker, E., The Denial of Death, 1973

34 Sartre, J.-P., No Exit, 1944

35 Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C., An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict, 1979

36 Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, W., Loneliness, 2008

37 Sartre, J.-P. (1943). Being and Nothingness.

38 Schwartz, B. (2004). The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less.

39 Nietzsche, F. (1887). On the Genealogy of Morals.

40 Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P., Helping Clients Forgive, 2000

41 Peterson, J. B., Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief, 1999

42 Kahneman, D., Thinking, Fast and Slow, 2011

Know[1.2-03] **The 12 Steps, Hero's Journey, Knowledge & Wisdom**

The Perennial Struggle is not a flaw; it is your path. It cannot be erased, but it can be accepted, understood, and even embraced. This book presents powerful, time-tested frameworks that provide a way forward. These systems, drawn from ancient wisdom and modern self-discovery, serve as a map to work within the Perennial Struggle rather than being trapped by it.

The 12 Steps provide a practical, structured way to address the struggle: recognizing that life is unmanageable (Step 1), releasing control to something greater (Steps 2-3), taking and admitting a deep personal inventory (Steps 4-5), making amends for harm done (Steps 8-9), and committing to continuous growth and service (Steps 10-12).

The Hero's Journey mirrors this process in a mythic, narrative form. The hero starts in the ordinary world, is called to adventure, faces trials, and ultimately undergoes death and rebirth, symbolizing the internal transformation necessary to move through the Perennial Struggle.

The sections on Knowledge and Wisdom add depth and dimension to these tools. By providing specific, actionable techniques for improvement, Knowledge directly addresses the myriad problems we all face. In Wisdom, you have access to some of the greatest ideas in human history.

Together, these tools offer a way to thrive within, rather than be consumed by, the lifelong challenges that shape you. They remind you that transformation is not a single event but an ongoing process of growth, loss, discovery, and integration.

This book is not meant to contain your entire journey. What it offers is a solid foundation and a place to return to. The real work will carry you beyond these pages, into experiences, practices, and insights that cannot be fully anticipated or prescribed. Your encounter with the Perennial Struggle will unfold in ways unique to you, shaped by your life, your losses, and your willingness to look honestly at yourself.

Use this book as a home base. Come back to it often. Build your Step work from it. Develop your own prayers, visualizations, and reflections. Create a way of life aligned with your values.

I return to these readings daily, but I let them point outward. Let this work steady you, then send you further, extending your vision and your inner travels as far as you are able.

Walking the Path with Awareness

The Perennial Struggle will always be there. No one escapes the struggle, but those who embrace it are the ones who find wisdom, meaning, and transformation along the way. You find not just survival, but the deep, enduring purpose that makes the struggle worthwhile.

1.3 A Good Life

There is no knowledge so hard to acquire as the knowledge of how to live this life well and naturally.

--MONTAIGNE

All truly wise thoughts have been already thought a thousand times; but to make them truly ours we must think them over again honestly, till they take firm root in our personal experience.

--Goethe

Know[1.3-01] **What Is a Good Life?**

I do not know anyone who wants to live a miserable life. I am sure you do not either. Everyone wants to be content and happy, with healthy relationships and the resources to live well. We have dreams of what we would like to do, or be, and experiences we would like to have. We want meaningful lives full of love and joy. We want to use our talents and gain respect from our peers. Details differ, but we each have a golden vignette of existence we call "a good life."

We think the problem is not in defining a good life but achieving it. We could be happy if we had more money, an understanding spouse, better self-discipline, or a lucky break. But the key ingredient always lies out of reach.

We want a good life but do not know how to begin. Yet we rarely consider what makes a good life. Vague notions of happiness and murky plans to achieve it guarantee our discontent. The definition of a good life is fluid and differs for each person. It changes over time because we are changed by time.

How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life!
Few are those who find it.

-- Matthew 7:14

Unhappiness stems from failed expectations and a gross misunderstanding of reality. It is easy to live an unhappy life based on failed expectations. You can then say, "Well, I did everything I was supposed to do," and wallow in your misery. Or, by carefully examining everything you think you know, you can discard what does not work, and keep only what does. When you unburden yourself from false expectations, then happiness (or at least, contentment) is what remains. Choosing to live this way is hard work - challenging, rewarding, and necessary to living a good life.

This was a difficult truth for me to understand, and now I am sharing it with you. The search for a good life is an integral part of the journey of being human. To live a good life, there are certain things you must learn and do.

1.3 A Good Life

Fortunately, ideas of a good life and how to live it are plentiful. They were explored by ancient Greek philosophers.[1] Spiritual traditions add depth to our understanding.[2] Addiction recovery transforms miserable lives to good lives every day.[3] Modern scientific study continues the discussion with great success.[4]

The knowledge and wisdom necessary to live a good life are available to those with the courage to seek them. Jonathan Fields said it well in "How to Live a Good Life":[5]

> *When I look at the astonishing body of wisdom around the pursuit of a good life, from the Stoics to the Buddha, from faith to science and metaphysics to mythology, it's clear to me that there is little, if anything, that has not been studied or said before [about how to live a good life]... Yet... much of humanity stumbles along, eternally yearning for a life it knows is possible, but having no idea how to find or create it. The problem isn't that we don't have the answers. We've had them for thousands of years. It's that the things that work are either engulfed in a vast sea of noise or... are too hard to find and validate, too complicated, too theoretical [or] too mired in dogma that war with the reality of our lives.*

We know what makes a good life. Some of these ideas are familiar; some may surprise you. First, if you ask people what they want most from life, many will say, "I just want to be happy." Or they list goals and accomplishments that they think would make them happy. Happiness and living a good life are intertwined, but not equivalent.

Merriam-Webster defines "happiness" as "a state of well-being and contentment".[6] The causes we attribute to happiness may be different, but we know what happiness feels like. The unspoken truth about happiness is that it is fickle and fleeting. What makes you happy today will be the norm tomorrow. Heartfelt desires turn to dust in your hands. Happiness is a transient state. Accepting this is a step toward growth.

A popular model concerning happiness states: 50% of your happiness is set by genetics, 10% by life circumstances, and 40% by your own choices and activities.[7] Your choices directly affect your experience of life.

Think of happiness as a by-product, not an end in itself. It is a result of living rightly and well, not a goal in itself. By living a good life, you increase your chances for physical and mental health, better relationships, and financial success, thus: happiness. Happiness is more ethical than psychological.[8] With rare exceptions, you can be happy if you choose to be. But you must commit to doing the work. Living a good life requires clear and consistent action.

---

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudaimonia#Eudaimonia_and_happiness
2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perennial_philosophy
3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recovery_model
4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive_psychology
5 Jonathan Fields, "How To Live A Good Life", 2016, Kindle Edition, p7
6 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/happiness
7 https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_much_of_your_happiness_is_under_your_control
8 Mortimer Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Part 2, Chapter 6

Know[1.3-02] **Conditions for a Good Life**

We know well the conditions necessary for a good life. Here is a basic representation based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs:[9]

First, physical needs must be met: air, food, water, clothing, shelter, and sleep. Next, we need to feel safe from danger, and physical intimacy. We need to love and be loved, and social acceptance. These are "deficiency needs". We notice them most when we do not have them.

Next are "growth needs." We need to learn and grow, and to feel that life has meaning and value. We need to feel a sense of achievement and worth. We need to become the best person we can. Sometimes we need to transcend ourselves or our current situation.

To make a list of needs is simple. However, you and I (and all humans), are adept at making simple tasks complex. Notice, for example, that "money" does not appear in the list above. Money is a complex symbol that represents security, achievement, and social approval. But money has no inherent value. It is metal, paper, and numbers stored in a computer. Money is a means to an end, with value only because we agree it does.

Another complicated topic is sex. In addition to physical need, sex relates to intimacy, sociology, psychology, and even politics. It encompasses a spectrum of beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behavior. Sex is many things to many people, and something to everyone. It is possibly the most complex subject in human experience.

Sex and money are two examples making several points. Without careful examination, you cannot know the difference between wants and needs. You do not know which needs are yours and which are social conditioning. You do not know if your goals are fueled by desire or fear. You think emotions are truth, and reality is the movie playing in your head. This is the human condition. It is not conducive to a good life.

Aristotle believed that what he called eudaimonia, or "the highest good," is well-being over the course of a lifetime.[10] He set these criteria for it:[11]

1. It must be desirable in itself.
2. It is not desirable for the sake of some other good.
3. All other goods are desirable for its sake.

These criteria are necessary, but not sufficient, for eudaimonia. Aristotle explicitly states a fourth requirement, as well, which is "good fortune."[12] And yet, as in the previous discussion of "happiness," the likelihood of fortunate circumstances is increased by living well.

---

[9] Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation", 1943

[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudaimonia

[11] From "Creative Commons by the Saylor Foundation", www.saylor.org/polsc201 Subunit 1.4. However, as of 15 Aug 2020, it was not available.

[12] 12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudaimonia

1.3 A Good Life

The harder you work, the luckier you get.

--Joe Ricketts

A good life is both the process and the result of living well. Everything we seek in life: health, wealth, virtue, knowledge, and wisdom is sought with the goal of living a good life. According to Aristotle, we must use reason and practical experience as a guide to ethical behavior. Happiness, then, is the result of living a rational and virtuous life.

Although good fortune cannot be excluded, good fortune alone ensures neither happiness nor a good life. Likewise, bad luck can and does make life difficult, even miserable. But no situation or circumstances can rob your life of dignity and meaning unless you allow it.

Virtually all of the things you think will make you happy and define a good life are incorrect. Society presents intensely mixed messages in this regard. While it glorifies wealth, power, and fame, it also promotes the idea of happiness through simplicity, gratitude, and living in the moment. These conflicting messages create confusion, leaving you chasing one ideal while feeling guilty for neglecting the other. This cycle turns happiness into something to buy or achieve, rather than something found within.

You have been told a story that shapes your goals and desires, whether it is about financial success, a perfect family, recognition, or adventure. These ideas did not form in a vacuum; they were influenced by society, your upbringing, and others. While some may resonate deeply, many are surface distractions. They seem like answers but pull you away from real happiness.

Take a moment to reflect on your current goals. Sort them based on whether they reflect your values or if you absorbed them from others. Common ideals are not wrong, but they often lead to disappointment. They miss the deeper needs for connection, purpose, and authenticity.

You cannot define a good life by following a script. Question your assumptions and figure out what truly fulfills you. This means letting go of fantasies and facing uncomfortable truths. By doing so, you can build a life that is truly yours, a life aligned with your values and what makes you feel alive, at peace, and fulfilled.

I will show you a practical philosophy for living well. It is an adaptation of a tried-and-true system that helps millions of people live a good life. As a butterfly breaks free of its cocoon, you will open your wings and fly. You are holding in your hand the tools you need to begin.

My life today is what I make of it today.

--Cheri, AA Member

1.4 The 12 Steps

Many people, nonalcoholics, report that as a result of the practice of A.A.'s Twelve Steps, they have been able to meet other difficulties in life. They think that the Twelve Steps can mean more than sobriety for problem drinkers. They see in them a way to be happy and effective living for many, alcoholic or not.

--Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 15-16

[Before I worked the Steps, I thought that…] no words written on paper with numbers in front of them is going to make everything all better.

--Dannie, AA Member

You don't necessarily need to be an alcoholic to work them damn Steps.

--Jake, AA Member

Origin of the 12 Steps

Although alcohol abuse has existed as long as people have been drinking it, alcoholism was seen as a lack of will, or moral weakness. For thousands of years, those who fell into the grip of alcohol addiction were objects of contempt to be vilified or made the butt of jokes. As recently as the 1960s, television shows often featured "the town drunk" character as either a contemptible object of pity or the jester of comic relief.

It is only in the last century that a workable solution to alcoholism has been available. It is not a cure. This solution consists of 12 Steps of suggested guidelines for spiritual growth and personal accountability. Written by Bill Wilson and refined by recovering alcoholics, the 12 Steps were first published in the book Alcoholics Anonymous in 1939. Since that time, the 12 Step program has been adapted to treat numerous substance abuse and behavioral problems. These include drug addiction, gambling, sexual addiction, and codependency.[1]

The 12 Steps emerged from a serendipitous confluence of spiritual, psychological, and personal factors. Bill Wilson was a hopeless alcoholic on his way to ruin. After giving up all expectations of recovery, an old friend introduced him to radical new ideas of a spiritual nature. These ideas came by way of an organization known as the Oxford Group.

The Oxford Group, modeled on early Christianity, practiced humility, personal reflection, and restitution. They also taught their members to "pray to whatever God" they thought existed, and if they did not believe in God, to pray to "whatever God there might be."[2] During the conversation with his newly sober friend, Bill Wilson experienced a powerful spiritual change, "…that became more wonderful as time passed."[3]

---

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_twelve-step_groups
2 Bill W., "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age", 1957
3 Bill W., et al, "Alcoholics Anonymous", 1939, p8

But spiritual insight is rarely sufficient to permanently change destructive behavior.[4] Bill Wilson's physician, Dr. William Silkworth, told him that alcoholism was less a moral failing than a physical and mental addiction.[5] Over time, the work of Carl Jung[6] and William James[7] were added to a growing understanding of alcoholism. From this eclectic mix was born the organization of Alcoholics Anonymous with the 12 Steps at its core.

Alcoholics Anonymous combined spirituality and psychology into a new and practical toolbox for living. You may question the relevance of a recovery program to your own life. Perhaps you are thinking, if you are not an alcoholic, it is not pertinent to you. I disagree. Allow me to pose this question: If there is a system or program that works for people in the dark depths of despair and addiction, might it not work for you, too?

> *It's a good way to live.*
>
> --Linda, AA Member

The 12 Steps: Overview

In addition to their use in recovery, the 12 Steps are a comprehensive philosophy of life. They help you embrace, identify, explore, accept, and maintain healthy levels of change.[8] It is because they work that I am bringing this version of the 12 Steps to you. Only in rare cases, where an individual "cannot or will not be completely honest with themselves,"[9] have I found the 12 Steps to be ineffective in changing a person's life.

The essence of working any version of the 12 Steps is this: You admit that life (or some aspect of it) is unmanageable. You connect with something greater than yourself. You take an honest look at who you are and how you lived. You admit what you find. You make a list of your mistakes and people you hurt (including yourself) and try to set things right. You continue to review your actions, daily. You pray, meditate, and make the world better.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life are an adaptation of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. There are many alternative versions of the 12 Steps.[10] I chose the wording of the 12 Steps to a Good Life after long consideration. The wording of these Steps is more in tune with the goal of living well in a general sense, for everyone.

---

[4] https://doi.org/10.1080/07347324.2021.1895016

[5] Bill W., et al, "Alcoholics Anonymous", 1939, "The Doctor's Opinion"

[6] In 1961, Jung penned a letter to Bill Wilson concerning Rowland H., in which he further states the necessity of a "vital spiritual experience" for recovery for alcoholism.

[7] http://dubgrp.com/content/william-james-bill-wilson-and-development-alcoholics-anonymous-aa

[8] Kristin Snowden, Marriage and Family Therapist, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lCIeAJLTN8

[9] Bill W., et al, "Alcoholics Anonymous", 1939, p58. This statement is often read at the beginning AA meetings under the Chapter 5 title, How It Works.

[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_twelve-step_groups

But I also believe that an individual's sincerity and intent is more important to their success than specific wording of the Steps. I encourage you to experiment with re-wording them so they work for you. At the end of the chapter, I provide lists of the original 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, and alternative versions from various sources.

The 12 Steps are not a dogmatic mold in which a person is hammered into a new shape. They are a path through the process of internal change. This is an important point. Nor do the 12 Steps offer the false promise of changing the universe to suit your needs. Instead, they offer the opportunity to change yourself to be in harmony with the universe. Following this internal change, the universe appears to rearrange itself. The universe does not change, but your perception of it does! It is a remarkable and enlightening experience.

Conventional recovery versions of the 12 Steps begin with a problem to be solved. Step 1 states a specific problem such as alcoholism, addiction, or codependence. The individual admits the problem and the unmanageability of life it causes. The remaining Steps are then understood to be in support of the solution to that problem.

Identification with a specific problem, like substance abuse, is difficult for those who have never experienced addiction, or do not recognize it in themselves. For them, the wording of conventional 12 Step programs may be problematic. Even for those in long-term continuing recovery, alternative phrasing may be helpful at some point.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life direct your attention to a problem common to all human beings. Step 1 states directly, "Life is Unmanageable". This is a reminder that we are not gods, that we will never know or understand everything, and that life is often so complex that we are overwhelmed.

Another hurdle people face in adopting the 12 Steps is perceived religiosity. The word "God" has many meanings and connotations. It appears four times in the 12 Steps of AA. Yet, Bill Wilson tells us, "It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning".[11] Thinking of divinity in this way throws open the gate for many nuanced levels of faith and spirituality. Many people, including myself, use the term "Higher Power" instead of the word "God". I discuss this at length in Steps 2 and 3.

Deceptively simple at first glance, the 12 Steps to a Good Life comprise a true psychological and spiritual journey. They take us from the ordinary world to the hidden spiritual world within. They change us from the inside out. Like the eponymous archetype of Joseph Campbell's mythic arc, "The Hero's Journey",[12] such a path requires courage and commitment. Yet, as you will see, even the desire to begin is sufficient.

---

11 Bill Wilson, et al, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p 12

12 Joseph Campbell, "The Hero With A Thousand Faces", 1949

1.4 The 12 Steps

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous[13]

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Alternate Versions of the 12 Steps

Although purists may object to changes in the wording of the original 12 Steps, Bill Wilson himself saw the benefits of doing so. Referring to changes made to the Steps in Buddhist countries, he wrote the following:

To some of us, the idea of substituting "good" for "God" in the Twelve Steps will seem like a watering down of AA's message. But here we must remember that AA's Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them as they stand is not at all a requirement for membership among us. This liberty has made AA available to thousands who never would have tried at all, had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written.[14]

Following are various versions of the 12 Steps. There are many more than I have listed. But you will see that, even while the wording and specific issues that they address differ, the intent of all versions of the Steps are the same. They are a framework to explore yourself, and your reality, and bring the two together. The Steps address the fragmentation that destroys lives, and integrates the individual into a healthy worldview.

I suggest you read these lists, even if they do not apply to you, so that you can see how they work. The Steps are flexible and adaptable to any situation in life, because they represent the essence of how to live a good life.

---

[13] Bill Wilson, et al, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p.59
[14] Bill Wilson, "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age", 1957

1.4 The 12 Steps

The 12 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous[15]

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

12 Steps to Get on Track: In The Zone[16]

1. Accept what is happening - Engage with your life as it is right now.
2. Be real, and true to yourself - Keep your feet on the ground.
3. Focus on the present moment - Complete existing agreements. |
4. Mindful action – Turn routine tasks into meditation.
5. Be aware of your feelings - Learn to listen to your intuition.
6. Deal with your fears - Expand your creativity.
7. Connect with others - Create new networks.
8. Be open to receive - Be aware of new opportunities coming for you.
9. Employ simple wisdom - You know more than you think you do.
10. Pace yourself - Allow time and space for joy, rest and recuperation.
11. Look for blessings - Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.
12. Give generously - Know yourself as a person who has more than enough.

---

[15] https://www.na.org/admin/include/spaw2/uploads/pdf/naway/en/9081_12_12_12_Dec2016.pdf

[16] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/12-steps-to-get-on-track_b_211214, 28 Oct 2019

1.4 The 12 Steps

The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous[17]

1. We admitted we were powerless over others - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other codependents, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

A Short Phrase List of the 12 Steps[18]

1. Powerlessness
2. Hope
3. Surrender
4. Inventory
5. Confession
6. Readiness
7. Asked God
8. Amends List
9. Make Amends
10. Continue Inventory
11. Keep Contact
12. Help Others

---

[17] https://12step.org/references/12-step-versions/coda/, 28 Oct 2019

[18] https://12step.org/the-12-steps/, 28 October 2019

A Buddhist's Non-Theist 12 Steps[19]

1. We admitted our addictive craving over alcohol, and recognized its consequences in our lives.
2. Came to believe that a power other than self could restore us to wholeness.
3. Made a decision to go for refuge to this other power as we understood it.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and another human being the exact moral nature of our past.
6. Became entirely ready to work at transforming ourselves.
7. With the assistance of others and our own firm resolve, we transformed unskillful aspects of ourselves and cultivated positive ones.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed.
9. Made direct amends to such people where possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. In addition, made a conscientious effort to forgive all those who harmed us.
10. Continue to maintain awareness of our actions and motives, and when we acted unskillfully promptly admitted it.
11. Engaged through the practice of meditation to improve our conscious contact with our true selves, and seeking that beyond self. Also used prayer as a means to cultivate positive attitudes and states of mind.
12. Having gained spiritual insight as a result of these steps, we practice these principles in all areas of our lives, and make this message available to others in need of recovery.

---

[19] https://realisticrecovery.wordpress.com/2009/05/29/a-buddhists-non-theist-12-steps/9

1.4 The 12 Steps

The Agnostic 12 Steps[20]

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to accept and to understand that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the A.A. program.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves without reservation, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.
7. Humbly sought to have our shortcomings removed.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through mindful inquiry and meditation to improve our spiritual awareness, seeking only for knowledge of our rightful path in life and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

---

[20] https://realisticrecovery.wordpress.com/2011/09/17/agnostic-12-steps-from-torontos-first-agnostic-aa-meeting-group/, 28 Oct 2019

1.4 The 12 Steps

Higher Power Version of the Twelve Steps[21]

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addiction / dysfunction / behavior - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Higher Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of that Higher Power as we understood it.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to our Higher Power, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have our Higher Power remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power, as we understood it, praying only for knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to "those still suffering", and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

---

[21] https://realisticrecovery.wordpress.com/2009/05/21/re-post-higher-power-version-of-the-twelve-steps/, 28 October 2019

The 12 Steps for Pagans[22]

1. We admitted that we have given our power and wills to (alcohol, drugs, food, anger, people, places, things, situations, the past - whatever you are having issues with…) and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to align our Will and our lives to that of True Will and place the care of our lives into the hands of the God/dess as we understand Him, Her, It, or Them.
4. Made a searching and fearless ethical inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to the God/dess, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have the God/desses remove these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked the God/dess to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would cause harm to them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer, meditation, and ritual to establish and improve our conscious contact with the God/desses as we understand Him, Her, It, or Them, asking only for knowledge of True Will and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to (alcoholics, addicts, co-dependents, overeaters, etc.), and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

---

[22] https://dapc.wordpress.com/pagan-12-steps/, 28 October 2019

1.4 The 12 Steps

The 12 Rational-Emotive Behavior Steps to Recovery[23]

1. I admit I have lost control of my addiction and that my life is becoming unmanageable.
2. I believe a rational attitude about my life can restore me to sanity.
3. I shall let rational thinking help me.
4. I shall make a searching and fearless inventory of my past decisions and actions.
5. I shall admit to myself and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.
6. I am entirely ready to have rational thinking remove my shortcomings.
7. I shall apply rational thinking to remove my shortcomings.
8. I shall make a list of all the persons I have harmed, and determine to make amends.
9. I shall make amends, wherever possible, except when doing so would injure someone.
10. I shall continue to take my inventory, and when I act wrongly, promptly admit it.
11. I shall seek to improve my conscious contact with reality, striving for the knowledge of what is rational and for the determination to act upon it.
12. Having an increased awareness as a result of what I have accomplished with these steps, I shall practice these principles in all of my affairs, and I will carry this message to others.

---

[23] https://realisticrecovery.wordpress.com/2009/02/01/the-universal-12-step-program/9

1.4 The 12 Steps

The 12 Stoic Steps[24]

1. We accept that we are no longer managing our lives as rational and social human beings.
2. We came to understand that virtue: wisdom, self-discipline, justice, and courage, can transform our lives; to regain our sanity and our place in society.
3. We have decided to work for continual progress, to act upon what is ours to change, and to accept what we cannot change.
4. We have made a searching and honest assessment of our core beliefs, our values, and our goals.
5. We admitted to ourselves and to another person the nature of the moral choices we have made in the past.
6. We are entirely ready to work to improve our character, to examine our impulses, our judgments, and our intentions.
7. We humbly accept that we must control our irrational motivations and our mistaken desires.
8. We understand the social nature of humans, that we are all one family and that justice is the supreme virtue.
9. We have attempted to reconcile ourselves with whoever we have been unjust, with the exception that in doing so would injure them or others.
10. We continue to give continual scrutiny to our thoughts, emotions, and intentions and to apply good judgment in all our acts.
11. We sought through conscious attention and meditation to improve our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world, wishing only to understand how we should act socially and rationally for the common good.
12. Having undergone a personal transformation through these steps we will carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

---

[24] https://stoicrecovery.com/2018/02/04/12-stoic-steps/

1.4 The 12 Steps

The 12 Steps of Overeaters Anonymous[25]

1. We admitted we were powerless over food - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The 12 Steps for the Rest of Us[26]

1. Admit you are powerless.
2. Believe that only something greater than yourself can help you become better than you are.
3. Make a decision to turn your will over to something greater than yourself.
4. Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself.
5. Admit to your shortcomings.

6 and 7. Prepare for progress.

8 and 9. Get right with the people of your life.

10. Keep track of what you're doing well, and what you're not, and promptly focus on the latter.
11. Set aside time to collect, reflect, and project.
12. Use what you've learned to help others.

---

[25] https://oa.org/working-the-program/twelve-steps/

[26] https://mikesturm.medium.com/the-12-steps-for-the-rest-of-us-general-principles-for- becoming-a-better-you-1a579179315c

12 Steps for Thoughts and Feelings[27]

1. I am powerless over my thoughts and feelings.
2. My Higher Power can restore me to mental and emotional health.
3. Turn my thoughts and feelings over to my Higher Power.
4. Inventory my thoughts and feelings.
5. Admit what I found.
6. Be ready to change my thoughts and feelings.
7. Humbly ask my Higher Power for help to change.
8. List the harm caused by my thoughts and feelings.
9. Make amends where possible.
10. Continue to inventory my thoughts and feelings.
11. Pray and meditate.
12. Continue these Steps and make the world better.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life

1. Life is unmanageable.
2. Be open to a Higher Power.
3. Rely on my Higher Power.
4. Take a personal inventory.
5. Admit what I found.
6. Be ready to change.
7. Humbly ask for change.
8. List the harm I caused.
9. Make amends where possible.
10. Continue my inventory.
11. Pray and meditate for guidance.
12. Make the world better.

Intent Matters

There are many versions of the 12 Steps.[28] Each set of Steps works best for those it is intended for. Such variety is healthy and lends credence to the fact that the Steps work for those who apply them diligently. Sincere intent is more important than how the Steps are worded. I illustrate this point from my own experience:

There came a time in my life when I could neither continue drinking nor imagine life without it. Along with the drinking were the problems both generated and camouflaged by it. Seeing a counselor, I agreed to abstain from alcohol for the duration of therapy.

---

[27] I developed this version of the Steps after going through a period of great emotional turmoil. See Mind, Thinking for Life on their use and development.

[28] Additional versions of the 12 Steps can be found in The Little Book: A Collection of Alternative 12 Steps by Roger C., 12Step.org and Realistic Recovery at realisticrecovery.wordpress.org.

One evening just a few days later, I had a row of empty beer bottles lined up in front of me. Step 1 of AA states, "admitted we were powerless over alcohol..." and "... our lives had become unmanageable."

But those were not the words that echoed through my mind. The thought I had, in that state of absolute despair was, "I am completely and totally F*CKED!" The words were different, but the intent was the same, and I certainly did not lack sincerity. I had just taken Step 1.

In the following days I became more terrified and desperate. I knew I could never stop drinking on my own. But I believed my counselor could help me. I also made an appointment with my doctor and started on medications for substance abuse disorder and depression.

I knew that both my counselor and my doctor were well-educated and professional. I had faith in their methods and experience. I gradually "came to believe" that these professionals, and later Alcoholics Anonymous, "could restore me to sanity." This was my Step 2.

Eventually the time came where I had to make a concrete decision concerning what to do with my life. I remember the extraordinary stress I felt. I was literally pacing across my small living room, alone, muttering to myself. On one hand, I could keep drinking and hold my life together as long as possible. On the other, I could try to change my life in a manner so radical and novel that I could not even imagine the outcome.[29]

I "made a decision" to do the best I could and to, the phrase in my mind was, "let the chips fall." I chose my path and let go of the outcome. I trusted that Life, or the Universe, or Whatever Was Out There, would take care of the rest. The relief after making this decision felt like a fever breaking. This was my Step 3.

The words I used for these first three Steps were nothing like the formal 12 Steps of AA. I knew about the Steps from previously attending AA meetings, but I was not intentionally taking the Steps in a conscious manner. What mattered was my intent and sincerity. Intent and sincerity are the energies that drive the 12 Steps. Honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are the mechanisms by which they operate. Specific wording is less important than what is in your mind and heart.

Know[1.4-01] **Commonality of the 12 Steps**

Next, let us compare versions of the Steps and find their similarities. You might want to try this on your own first. Review the versions of the Steps and try to figure out what each Step does or what it is for. Different versions of the Steps have more in common than not.

Step 1 is an admission of being powerless, stuck, addicted, or craving, with a desire for change. You acknowledge life can be better. With Step 1, you recognize that your problems are, at least to some degree, beyond your control. Ultimately, you realize that Step 1 is a turning point from your old way of life to living a new way.

---

[29] In recovery we say that only an alcoholic or addict struggles with that decision.

Step 2 recognizes that you need outside help to change your situation. You need resources beyond what you currently have available. For Step 2, it is not necessary that it be a deity or supernatural influence. It must only be something more effective, or more powerful, than what you currently have.

Step 3 marks your decision to accept help from an outside source. Many versions of the 12 Steps use the idea of "submission" or "surrender" to convey the psychological state necessary for Step 3. I suggest that the ideas of "alignment," "cooperation," "participation," or "reliance" also apply. Step 3 is a voluntary decision to rely less on your ego. It does not imply loss of free will or identity. Step 3 invites you to partner with something other than, and smarter / greater / wiser / more powerful than yourself.

Step 4 is an inventory, or investigation into yourself and your past. It gives you an opportunity to look clearly at your beliefs, desires, and decisions. Step 4 puts the maxim, "Know thyself"[30] into action. For many, the process of such investigation is terrifying, but the result can be a freedom like you have never known. As in any heroic endeavor, there is risk. You can be ensnared by guilt or mesmerized by thoughts of what might have been. It is paramount to diligently follow the guidelines for this Step. If possible, have a sponsor, counselor, or mentor assist you.

Step 5 accepts and makes real the results of the inventory from Step 4. To confess is to accept. To share is to make real. Though better by far to admit your mistakes to another person and your Higher Power, there are rare exceptions. Step 5 provides an unburdening, a sharing of the weight of the mistakes you made in your life. It is an enlightening experience like no other.

Step 6 signals your readiness to change. You may ask, "If I am aware of my personal defects, why not change?" But insight alone does not always lead to change.[31] Many of the issues causing problems for you are habits and learned behaviors. They usually serve some protective purpose.[32] Many of these behaviors feel like they are part of your identity. You must make a conscious decision to give up the thoughts and behaviors that hold you back.

Step 7 allows change to happen. Change occurs, not through willpower, but through your Higher Power, whatever that might be. Commitment and effort are required, not to fuel the will, but to engage the process of transformation. It is not a violent imposition upon the self. Step 7 is a natural process of growth from within, like a flower unfolding.

Step 8 is a list, based on the results of Step 4, of the harm you caused. This list includes yourself. It also includes institutions, friends, family members, and even pets and other creatures. It is not an excuse to wallow in self-recrimination and guilt. It is an opportunity to be free of the dark baggage you have been carrying all your life.

---

[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_thyself

[31] Dariusz Kuncewicz, Kinga Lachowicz-Tabaczek, Jacek Załuski, "Why insight in psychotherapy does not always lead to behaviour change", pdf, retrieved from https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/pjap/ 12/2/article-p99.xml, 25 May 2020

[32] John Bradshaw, "Bradshaw: On the Family", 1988, p 36-38

Step 9 cleans up the past by making amends to those individuals and groups where possible, and restitution where necessary. You may be tempted to let the past stay in the past. But be it karma or some mechanism of the psyche, you will not know true peace until you work this Step to the best of your ability. There is a single caveat: you do not make amends if the act of doing so causes more harm. This is discussed fully in the chapter on Step 9.

Step 10 is the ongoing process of self-inventory. It allows you to monitor your progress, so you notice when you get off track. Along with that is the implied notion of admitting and correcting mistakes as soon as possible. Step 10 continues the progress you worked so hard to achieve.

Step 11 continues spiritual and psychological growth. The words "prayer" and "meditation" are placeholders for the methods you choose to commune with your Higher Power. There are many ways to do so. This Step defines your day-to-day relationship with your Higher Power.

Step 12 is giving back. It is making the world better because you are here. Through an odd quirk in the universe, doing good things and helping others makes your life better.[33]

What is not apparent from browsing or reading about the 12 Steps is how additional knowledge and wisdom may be gained through working them. Rather than a static list of "to do's" with check boxes, they are a dynamic pathway to personal change and improvement.

Although each Step stands alone, there is a beautiful context in their progression. Steps 1 to 3 begin a new journey with acceptance of outside help. Steps 4 and 5 are the examination and integration of difficult truths about yourself. Steps 6 and 7, literally the middle of the Steps, are the bridge that connects problems to solutions. Steps 8 and 9 clean up your past. Steps 10, 11, and 12 make continuing progress part of daily life.

The 12 Steps provide an infrastructure by which practical information may be utilized efficiently. Like the wellness paths and exercise stations one finds in a city park, the 12 Steps provide direction to your journey, and at each Step you may take additional actions to complement that journey. For example, Step 1 is a great opportunity to assess your personal values and well-being. At Step 2, you practice gratitude and openness to experience. While working Step 3 you can learn relaxation exercises and Inner Focus, and so on. Many people make Steps 1 to 3 and 10 to 12 a daily practice. In doing so, you cherish each day as a personal journey of progress. This idea of working the Steps as a journey is expanded in the next chapter.

Ultimately, the 12 Steps do more than guide you through a process of self-improvement, they transform how you approach life itself. The Steps intertwine with the archetypal Hero's Journey, where each challenge you face and overcome leads to greater strength, wisdom, and insight. They teach you to accept life's uncertainties with courage and to view setbacks, not as failures, but as stepping stones to positive change.

---

[33] Jonathon Haidt, "The Happiness Hypothesis", Chap 10

This perspective aligns with the themes of growth and transformation that you will explore throughout the book. Life is not a ladder to perfection, but a process of becoming.

The beauty of the 12 Steps lies in their adaptability and universal relevance. They are not limited to addressing a single issue or for a specific group of people. They work for anyone striving toward personal growth, healing, or a deeper sense of purpose. Each Step meets you exactly where you are, offering a practical framework for facing life's challenges. Their timeless principles bridge cultural, social, and personal differences, making them as meaningful to anyone seeking improvement as to those individuals in addiction recovery.

Know[1.4-02] **The 12 Steps and The Hero's Journey**

What sets the 12 Steps apart is how they align with the universal archetype of the Hero's Journey.[34] This timeless narrative reflects the human experience of facing trials, confronting fears, and emerging transformed. Each Step parallels a stage of the Hero's Journey: the call to action, the obstacles and allies encountered along the way, and the eventual return home with greater wisdom. By working the Steps, you embark on a similar journey of self-discovery and transformation, learning to embrace life's challenges as opportunities for growth and resilience.

Each Step is more than a task to complete; it becomes part of your ongoing journey. The Steps guide you to confront the past with honesty, take purposeful action in the present, and build a vision for the future. They teach you to approach setbacks not as failures but as stepping stones toward positive change. Much like the Hero's Journey, the Steps challenge you to step outside your comfort zone and trust in the process, even when the path ahead is uncertain.

As you engage with the Steps, their wisdom deepens through practice and reflection. They guide you in transforming struggles into strengths and in building a life filled with intention and fulfillment. Whether you are reflecting on your values, making amends, or cultivating daily practices, the Steps provide tools to help you grow into your best self. Like the Hero's Journey, the 12 Steps are both a challenge and a gift, offering a pathway to lasting change and a richer, more meaningful life.

I am excited and humbled to present these tools. Working the Steps changed my life. I am sure they will change yours. In the next section, I show you how you can begin to apply the 12 Steps in your own life.

---

[34] See Part 2 for expansion of the 12 Steps and The Hero's Journey

Part 2: 12 Steps to a Good Life:
The Hero's Journey
Through Knowledge and Wisdom

Furthermore, we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; and where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

--Joseph Campbell

A Broad Perspective

Perfection is impossible. But while striving toward perfection, you can achieve the best results you are capable of. Voltaire said, "Perfect is the enemy of good." In recovery, it is often said, "Progress, not perfection."[1] Knowing the impossibility of perfection can still spur you to do your best. The road has been charted for you. The path has been trod by many. The signposts are abundant if you look for and heed them.

I take a wide view of personal development. There is no single person or philosophy that can provide everyone with everything they need to live well. The 12 Steps to a Good Life are an attempt to weave many threads of development and wellness into a system you can build on yourself. This section provides an overview of how the various concepts, ideas, and techniques are tied together into a coherent whole.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life

In "12 Steps to a Good Life: The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge and Wisdom", the Steps are the primary structure for self-development. They rest on the fact that, although humans are fallible, anyone can become a better person at any stage of life. Working the Steps never leads you to the expectation of perfection or the disappointment that brings. Instead of perfection you look to steady and continuing progress.

A Path to Change

Working the 12 Steps to a Good Life helps you change in an intelligent and systematic way. Each Step invites you to learn new skills and embrace new ideas. Fortunately, you do not have to do this all at once. You work one Step at a time before you go to the next. You work each Step when you are ready and continue with that Step until it is complete.

---

[1] https://sober.com/progress-not-perfection-aa

Completing a Step can be very subjective. The only requirement to complete a Step is to do your best. Each Step has reading material and suggestions for you to work on. When you understand the Step and have done your best, you are finished with that Step. You will feel a sense of closure. Do not overthink it. When you finish a Step, move on to the next one. If you do not feel you have finished, continue working that Step with renewed vigor.

The Steps Are Simple but Not Easy

Academic studies regarding the 12 Steps are few,[2] but in my experience, the common problem in working a 12 Step program is a tendency to over complicate it. There seems to be a connection between an individual's ego and the degree of complexity they bring to working the Steps. We think something must be complicated to be effective. That is ego at work.

I was a master of making the Steps complicated. They seemed too simple to accomplish what was claimed for them. Since I was full of ego, I was sure the Steps must be packaging for some hidden spiritual truth. My ego worked overtime trying to figure it out.

The more I allowed my ego into the Steps, the more I was lost to their meaning. The Steps contain no hidden mystical or esoteric secrets. Be clear on that; the Steps allow you to find the truth within yourself. They help you strip away the false layers of self.

The Steps are simple, if daunting, guidance on how to live a good life. Truth is not hidden in the Steps; it is hidden in you.[3] By working the Steps, you uncover the truth within yourself.

I have mentored individuals through the Steps. I have seen complexity manufactured from simplicity. I have done so myself. The Steps are simple, but they are not easy. They are not easy because they provide exactly what people say they are looking for: truth.

When I was taking guitar lessons, my teacher often said, "Most people like the idea of playing a guitar more than they like playing a guitar."[4] He meant people have an image of what it is like to play. They see themselves as popular, or talented, or famous, or just "cool". But the reality is that playing a guitar with any skill requires hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of practice. Most people are not willing to put in the work to reach the level of skill that matches their fantasy.

Likewise, people want to love themselves, to be happy, to live an authentic life. They want to develop spiritually, to know themselves, to be comfortable with who they are. We lack these things, in part, because we lack self-knowledge. And yet, when people go to the edge of the abyss and look down,[5] fear of truth is greater than desire for truth.

---

[2] Due to anonymity, there is little data regarding the efficacy of 12 Step programs: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64351/

[3] "...for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.", Luke 17:21

[4] Thanks, Dave, for the conversation, the insights, and your unending patience while teaching me that old dogs really can learn new tricks!

[5] A nod to Nietzsche, and Van Halen, "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love", 1978

Many people who quit the Steps do so because they over complicate them, or because they fear the truth they might find. It is easier and more comfortable to seek the truth than find it. We like the idea of truth more than we value truth itself.

Know[Part 2-01] **The Steps Are Adaptable**

The first time I worked the Steps was in recovery for alcoholism. The second time was a scaled-down version to quit smoking. The third time was for serious relationship issues. I continue to work the 12 Steps to a Good Life to live better.

Versions of the 12 Steps are used in addiction and behavior recovery programs because they work. They also work for other issues as a practical program of continuing progress. The Steps can be used for on-going self-improvement and addressing specific and wide-ranging personal matters. Seek professional help if you have addiction, behavior, or mental health issues.

I often advise people, "If an issue is worthy of your concern, it is worth working the Steps on." Work the Steps on personal matters that affect your life. But keep in mind that they are not a wish machine for manifesting trivial desires. They are based on psychological and spiritual principles that work.

If you are adapting the Steps to specific issues, do not overload your program. Do not try to fix multiple problems simultaneously. Return to your values, and work on the most pressing problems, one at a time.

To adapt the Steps to a specific issue, review the versions of 12 Steps in "1.4 The 12 Steps". Word the Steps to fit your problem in a way that works for you. See the chapters on each Step for details. Tailor each Step to address the problem or issue you are working on:

1. Take an honest look at how the issue affects you and the problems it causes. Admit that you cannot change it by yourself and that life, or at least some part of it, is unmanageable.

2. Be open to your Higher Power helping you to work on the issue.

3. Ask, and rely on, your Higher Power to help you.

4. Take a detailed inventory on every aspect surrounding the issue you want to change. Be as honest as you can at the time. Find a mentor, counselor, or advisor to help you, if possible.

5. Admit what you found in your inventory, preferably to yourself, another person, and your Higher Power.

6. Be ready to change your behavior, habits, or way of thinking in a way that would bring the change about. Explore exactly what that change would be and how it would be different from what you are doing now. List the resources you need to assist in that change.

7. Humbly asked your Higher Power for change. Do not be selfish or self-centered, but take this Step from the standpoint of making yourself better and helping others.

8. Make a list of any damage your problem, issue, or behavior has caused to others as well as yourself.

9. Make amends (fix the damage) where possible, to yourself or others, unless that would cause more damage.

10. Continue watching for recurrence of the problem or issue. Admit when these occur and repair the damage immediately.

11. Pray and meditate to your Higher Power for guidance and assistance in continuing to work on the problem.

12. Make the world better (not just for you) for all concerned.

I suggest working the 12 Steps to a Good Life through at least once before adapting them to other issues. Doing so may bring the changes you seek, as well as other benefits you did not expect.

When working the Steps for a specific issue, you may pause your work on the 12 Steps to a Good Life, work the other set of Steps all the way through, and then continue. However, if you are comfortable with it, and it is not too confusing, you may continue both concurrently. An example of this is when I worked the 12 Steps for Thoughts and Feelings, described in Mind.

Working the Steps in Order

Each Step is explained in detail. Work each Step as completely and thoroughly as you can. The Steps are like steppingstones on a path: one leads directly to the next. But you cannot leap ahead. You can only experience, and work, one Step at a time.

Do not anticipate a Step before you take it. As you work each Step, you gain knowledge and wisdom to apply to the Steps that follow. Be thorough, but do not seek perfection. You are looking for practical results. Work the Steps and let the results come to you. Allow the change to happen.

Think of planting a garden. You dig a hole, drop in a seed, and cover it up. Then you water the seed. You clear the weeds around it. And you wait. You cannot make the seed grow. You cannot force it to germinate and push its leaves out of the ground. You can do a lot and control a lot. You can add fertilizer, irrigation, even artificial sunlight. But you cannot make that seed grow, no matter what you do. You can only step back and allow it to grow.

Working the Steps is like caring for a garden. You do the best you can. You do the work. You read and study. You pray and meditate. You prepare yourself with knowledge and wisdom. And then you wait. You allow the change to happen. You allow yourself to be transformed because that is how transformation works.

Do not be confused because on one hand I talk about working toward change, and on the other I say allow change to happen. This is not a contradiction. Through working the Steps, you make space in your life for change. You open a door. You embrace opportunity. You cannot make change happen, but you can make it possible for change to happen.

The beauty of transformation is that you cannot make it happen; it is out of your control. If you can control it, it is not transformation. You can only set the stage and let it take place. You water a garden but the flowers bloom on their own. A caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon and emerges as a butterfly. You work the Steps to prepare for change, and change happens. Spontaneous change is rebirth.

Working with Others

Thoughts and behavior are reinforced by like-minded people.[6] When we surround ourselves with others who think a certain way, the chances are we will think the same way. This is a human trait. It is the basis of political parties, religions, social clubs, sports fans, and other groups.

You can successfully work the Steps alone for issues not related to addiction or addictive behaviors. But your efforts are enhanced by working with others. There is a reason 12 Step groups have regular meetings. The knowledge and wisdom of the group influence the individual members. It is easier to do something if people around you are doing the same thing. Your opinions are reinforced when you speak with those who have similar opinions.

If you find like-minded individuals, you can start informal groups to work the Steps together. You need only two or more people to begin.[7] Speak with friends, family, or someone you know with similar interests.

If you do not know anyone working the Steps, it will be difficult to find a group. Social media serves this purpose well. Use it as a launch point to contact other individuals. You can establish your own groups on various platforms. I discourage sharing personal information that would identify you on social media. Keep in mind safety issues if you meet others in person.

Some of the Steps suggest you reflect upon and write down private information. Do not share this information with anyone you do not trust. Protect your privacy. Be selective in whom you confide your secrets.

You can work the Steps with others by reading and discussing the various materials. Bring in outside material you deem pertinent. But when it comes time to discuss personal information with others (as in Step 5), you may be wise to meet with a professional, such as a minister or therapist. This is a judgment call you must make. There are alternatives, such as journaling or writing letters, that are discussed later.

The Steps are not a closed system. Quite the opposite. You can work the Steps concurrently with counseling or therapy.[8] I found this to be helpful. Ask your counselor if they are familiar with 12 Step work. Feel free to take this book to your sessions.

---

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conformity

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaboration; See also Matthew 18:19-20

[8] https://health.osu.edu/health/mental-health/therapy-vs-counseling-is-there-a-difference

Although working with others on the Steps is helpful, it is not necessary, except in cases of addiction or addictive behaviors. "The 12 Steps to a Good Life: The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge and Wisdom" are written so you can work them as an individual, at your own pace, in your own way. If you are honest and thorough, you will make progress.

If you work with others, protect your privacy as appropriate and be mindful for your safety.

Guidelines for 12 Step Groups

Suggestions for the administration of 12 Step groups are called "traditions." These may be formal or informal, depending on the members, and size of the group. Most recovery groups base their traditions on the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.[9] I will not go into detail except to provide a condensed and modified list of the traditions.[10] If you work the Steps in a group, written guidelines are helpful to maintain orderly administration.

In recovery, membership in a group is determined by the members' desire to adhere to the common purpose. In a private or personal group, you need include only those helpful for mutual progress.

Keep your group focused on the goal of living a good life through the 12 Steps. Any related subject is open for discussion, but political or religious and other disagreements have no place.

Maintain financial and ideological independence. Refuse outside donations.

Expenses should be met through member contributions.

No single individual should be in charge; rotate duties or assign them by election or lottery. Most groups have a treasurer to handle financial matters, as well as other offices.

Have group meetings to elect officeholders and decide administrative issues. Each member gets one vote.

Do not get mired in cliques or personalities. Treat every member equally. Sometimes the best ideas and most insightful comments come from where you least expect it.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life are meant to be worked by you, as an individual. You will benefit by working with others, but except in cases of addiction or addictive behavior, it is by no means a requirement.

Is It Too Late to Change?

I know people in recovery in their 60s, and even their 70s. It is never too late to change or be better. Once you decide it is too late, or you are too old to change, hope is lost. If you stop learning and growing, the chance for happiness withers. The doors of opportunity close. Life loses its luster and meaning. It is never too late to change.

---

[9] 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1953

[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Traditions, retrieved 10 June 2020

How Many Times Do You Work the Steps?

You can work the Steps as many times as you like. Through the Steps, you will discover yourself. Human psychology is layered.[11] Each time I find some truth about myself, there is another layer below it, and another below that. At times I have been horrified, or terrified, by what I found. But in the end, I have never regretted knowing these things about myself.

I have worked the Steps formally and completely multiple times. But I have also worked the Steps partially, or sets of Steps concurrently. Each time, they changed my life for the better.

Had I realized the Steps are useful in every situation, at every stage of life, I would have made better use of them. I had the information for years. But I am human, and I only fell back on them when nothing else worked. I finally realized that the Steps are a cycle of personal growth. To improve your life, work the Steps.

Know[Part 2-02] **What Step Are You On?**

In my AA home group, we had an old timer named Pete.[12] When someone brought him a problem, his first question was, "What Step are you on?" He believed most personal difficulties could be resolved by working the Steps. His question shifted focus from the problem to the solution.

Always know what Step you are on. If you lose momentum, never be afraid to start over. If you are working on some specific issue, work your way through the Steps on it, one Step at a time. If you lose your way or get confused, ask yourself, "What Step am I on?"

Resistance to Change

You may be surprised when the opportunity for change is within your grasp and you are tempted to refuse it. We are creatures of habit. We get comfortable in the status quo. We fear the unknown.[13] Resistance to change is a normal reaction many people have when facing a new way of life. Acknowledge it and continue working the Steps. This problem is addressed at length in Step 6.

Reaction from Friends and Family

You may be shocked if friends or family express disapproval of what you are doing. They might even try to dissuade you from continuing. Relationships are complex and formed of many unspoken interpersonal transactions.[14] It may be difficult for others to accept when you change. If you make positive changes in your life, they will see that.

---

11 Carl Rogers,"On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy," 12min.com abridged summary.

12 In AA, "Old timer" is a term of respect, referring to a person with years of continuous sobriety and who shares their wisdom with other members

13 https://markmanson.net/the-3-paradoxes-of-life#paradox-of-control

14 https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/silent-agreements/201905/how-to-free-your-relationship-from-unwanted-expectations

The people who genuinely care about you will applaud your desire to live a better life. Be grateful for that. Sometimes, they will just look the other way. That is all you can expect. It is enough. Work the Steps as best you can in your current situation. All you can do is your best.

If you introduce a new practice into your life, like prayer, people close to you might be surprised or even belittle you. Do not try to force your desire for change on others. Do not preach to, or try to convert them. Although you do not have to hide working the Steps, there are times when discretion is wise. You do not have to announce everything you do and every Step you take. Working the Steps must be your own journey.

The Steps Are Not the Only Way

There are many paths to progress. The 12 Steps are one path. Various versions of the Steps worked for me. I know they worked for others. This is all the evidence I need. The Steps work.

The Steps are compatible with other belief systems and philosophies. I do not know of any that are in contradiction to them. They condense important psychological and spiritual teachings into an understandable and workable format. They simplify the complex and forge a path through mystery.

You may try the Steps and decide they are not for you.[15] Or you may leave the Steps and then come back to them. That is fine. Make your own decisions. Keep the Steps in mind, and if you exhaust other avenues of progress, return to them when you are ready.

Working the Steps Out of Order

An important guideline is to work all the Steps, in order, one at a time. This is especially recommended the first time you work through them. You must become familiar with them in their proper sequence to understand the dynamics of how they bring change. Each Step lays the spiritual and psychological groundwork for the next. Work the Steps in order at least once to put the structure for personal growth in place.

With that said, the Steps are suggestions. They are not rules. There are two exceptions where you may decide to work the Steps out of order:

1. Once you understand them, you can work subsets of Steps when necessary. For example, you can work Step 4 and 5 to explore a problem. Step 6 and 7 can address a specific personal defect. Step 8 and 9 can set things right in a relationship. And so on. But working Steps out of order is recommended only when you are thoroughly familiar with them.

2. After completing the Steps the first time, I suggest you review Steps 1 to 3 and 10 to 12 regularly, even daily. Making this a habit reinforces your intent to live a good life. How you do this is your choice. You can have a set time, a personal ritual, or simply restate your intentions as you go about your day.

---

[15] I do not shy away from the fact that there are alternative recovery, spiritual, and self-help programs and formats. However, the Steps worked for me and I have witnessed the positive effect they had in other people's lives. Use what works for you.

Know[Part 2-03] **The Hero's Journey**

Working the Steps presents you with a fundamental archetypal human experience, called "The Hero's Journey". The Hero's Journey (also called the "monomyth"[16]) is an apt metaphor for how the 12 Steps take you out of your comfort zone to integrate new knowledge and wisdom into your life. It is a framework for human development based on religion and mythology.[17] In an exhaustive comparison, Joseph Campbell[18] found extraordinary similarities in the myths and beliefs of cultures from around the world and throughout history.[19] He said:

What I think is that a good life is one hero journey after another. Over and over again, you are called to the realm of adventure, you are called to new horizons. … if you do dare, the dangers are there, and the help also, and the fulfillment or the fiasco. There's always the possibility of fiasco. But there's also the possibility of bliss.

The monomyth (here used interchangeably with "The Hero's Journey") is claimed to be the ultimate narrative for human growth and change. There is controversy,[20] of course, because no single pattern can express all human experience. However, the monomyth is an invaluable tool and has been adopted by writers[21] and psychologists[22] as a guide to understanding the human experience.

Some examples of movies using the monomyth pattern are: "The Hobbit (2012)," "Rocky (1976)," "The Matrix (1999)," and "Star Wars (1977)." There are many others.[23] These stories from popular culture serve to illustrate the universal nature of the Hero's Journey.[24]

In mythology, heroes braved the unknown for new knowledge and wisdom.[25] Prometheus stole fire from the gods. Jason found the golden fleece. Aeneas explored and brought knowledge from the underworld.

The Hero's Journey flows from universal myth. Campbell states:

It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts… the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.[26]

---

16 https://www.oed.com/dictionary/monomyth_n

17 John Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", Preface to the 1949 Edition

18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Campbell

19 Peterson, Seligman, "Character Strengths and Virtues", 2004, takes a similar approach

20 https://ip312enchiridion.wordpress.com/2020/10/09/campbells-the-heros-journey/

21 https://blog.reedsy.com/heros-journey/

22 https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-angry-therapist/201708/how-use-the- hero-s-journey-life-coaching-tool

23 https://venngage.com/blog/heros-journey/, Retrieved 10 June 2020

24 Many popular Hero's Journey stories were later deconstructed by post-modern culture, such as "Indiana Jones", "Star Wars", "Star Trek", and comic book superheroes.

25 John Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", Kindle edition, location 468

26 John Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", Kindle edition, location 126

Like myth, religion demonstrates the validity of the Hero's Journey as a pattern for growth.[27] There are many other divine or semi-divine figures who journeyed into the unknown or the underworld. Jesus,[28] Krishna,[29] Odin,[30] Uke Mochi,[31] and others left the ordinary world, and returned with new knowledge and wisdom. These examples do not diminish the validity of faith but highlight the archetypal accuracy of the monomyth.

The 12 Steps as The Hero's Journey

In the Hero's Journey, the protagonist (the hero) is called on to begin an epic journey. It may be physical, psychological, or spiritual, and usually contains elements of all three. The Hero's Journey is an archetype of many kinds of journeys. It is also a metaphor for the cycle of personal change.

Looking back on your own life, you can see that each stage or phase was marked by leaving your comfort zone. You had to find new knowledge and wisdom to enter a new phase of life. Returning to normalcy is (hopefully) to a better life.

Usually, change only happens through a painful process of random events. Life crashes into you, or you crash into life. If it is painful enough, you are forced to change. Working the Steps allows you to choose to change, rather than being forced to change.[32]

People talk about attending the "school of hard knocks," meaning they have attained practical knowledge and wisdom through life experiences. The "hard knocks" refer to injuries or pain from situations where they ran headlong into reality and learned from it.

Know[Part 2-04] Reality

Running into reality is like smashing your car into a train. Reality wins every time. There are no exceptions. And like crashing into a train, you rarely come out unscathed. Approaching life in this way can have one of three results:

1. You are damaged emotionally, mentally, physically, or spiritually. You learn from your errors and determine not to make the same mistake again. You accept life on life's terms.[33] You heal, if possible.
2. You are damaged. You keep making the same mistakes.[34] Your life becomes a downward spiral of misery.
3. You are damaged irreparably, beyond any hope of healing, and you die.[35]

---

[27] Kersey Graves, "The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors", 1876. Although dated, he compares 16 messianic figures. However, instead of noting the obvious universal archetype, he uses his research to support scientific atheism.
[28] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus
[29] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna
[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odin
[31] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukemochi
[32] See Part 1: Foundation
[33] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p 417
[34] An old cliché is, "The definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expecting different results." https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/03/23/same/
[35] In recovery we say that unchecked alcoholism or addiction can only end in institutions, imprisonment, or death. But this is true for other "bad habits" as well.

Everyone likes to think they fall into the first category, learning from their mistakes. Sadly, this is rarely the case. Think of illnesses from personal choices, such as smoking, a sedentary lifestyle, drinking, drugs, and overeating. Careers are destroyed by carelessness or impulse. Recurring relationship problems devastate partners, emotionally scar children, and drain family resources. These are only a few examples, proof that we rarely learn from our mistakes, but repeat them again and again.

Nietzsche said, "What does not kill me makes me stronger,"[36] but this is not always true,[37] and an oversimplification.[38] Sometimes hard knocks cause permanent damage.[39]

The aphorism from Nietzsche oozes verisimilitude. It is one of those short and pithy phrases that sound true but often are not. Ideas like these, especially when they come from brilliant people like Nietzsche, lead us astray. We like simple ideas that make us feel good and reinforce our current beliefs.[40] Modern internet culture is awash with these memes.[41]

In most cases, the more grounded a person is, the happier they are. Happiness results from a life well lived by knowing what is true, what is not true, and living accordingly. These are basic tenets of Stoicism,[42] recovery,[43] and positive psychology.[44]

A grounded person understands their own values, strengths, and limitations, which allows them to live with clarity and purpose. By accepting what they cannot control, and focusing on what they can, they reduce unnecessary stress and frustration. This approach emphasizes living in alignment with your authentic self, leading to deeper, more enduring happiness.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life

The 12 Steps to a Good Life help you live well in reality, whatever that reality may be. Accepting reality does not mean you are giving in. Accepting reality means you live well when you know what is real and what is not.

By working the 12 Steps to a Good Life you take a methodical approach to exploring reality and your place in it. You discover who you are, where you are in life, and where you want to go.

---

[36] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_does_not_kill_me_makes_me_stronger

[37] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/201008/what-doesnt-kill- you-makes-you-weaker

[38] Jonathan Haidt, "The Happiness Hypothesis", p12

[39] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-traumatic_stress_disorder

[40] http://www.learning-mind.com/cognitive-ease/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias

[41] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme

[42] See Wisdom, The Enchiridion

[43] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p 62

[44] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happiness#Causes_and_achievement_methods

Once again, here are the 12 Steps to a Good Life:

1. Life is unmanageable.
2. Be open to a Higher Power.
3. Rely on my Higher Power.
4. Take a personal inventory.
5. Admit what I found.
6. Be ready to change.
7. Humbly ask for change.
8. List the harm I caused.
9. Make amends where possible.
10. Continue my inventory.
11. Pray and meditate for guidance.
12. Make the world better.

By working the Steps, you become the hero in your journey of life. You leave what you know and travel into the unknown territory of your inner self. You find and fix your mistakes. You return to the world with the knowledge and wisdom you gain.

Know[Part 2-05] Your Hero's Journey through the 12 Steps

The Hero's Journey is initially divided into three sections: departure, initiation, and return. A simple application of the Hero's Journey to your life is: leaving your comfort zone, acquiring new knowledge and wisdom, and returning to life transformed.

The sections are further divided into stages. Joseph Campbell listed seventeen stages.[45] Writers use variations of these for plot development.[46] For adaptation to the 12 Steps, I use seven stages:

The Journey Begins: Step 1
Threshold: Step 2 & 3
Challenge: Step 4 & 5
Revelation: Step 6
Transformation: Step 7
Atonement: Step 8 & 9:
Return Home: Step 10, 11, & 12:

Viewing them through the lens of the monomyth gives the 12 Steps a wider perspective. It provides you with a working correspondence between the 12 Steps to a Good Life and the Hero's Journey:[47]

---

[45] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero%27s_journey#Campbell's_seventeen_stages

[46] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Basic_Plots

[47] The similarities of metaphorical journeys, of psychological and spiritual growth, and as vehicles for personal change, make such a comparison obvious. It elevates the search for personal growth to a more meaningful level and a goal worthy of great effort. It allows you to view your struggle as an epic adventure in which you are the hero of your own story. It elevates your trials and difficulties to a noble context of meaning.

The Journey Begins

Step 1: Life is Unmanageable

By acknowledging life's unmanageability, you develop resilience and a sense of humility. You are a beautiful spark of consciousness exploring a vast universe. Accepting reality, you begin to live life on life's terms.

Threshold

Step 2: Be Open to A Higher Power.
Step 3: Rely on My Higher Power.

You open yourself to change by becoming open to a Higher Power. Reliance on a Higher Power is embracing life. It is accepting what is. It is accepting truth, wherever that might lead. By relying on a Higher Power, you cross a threshold into a new way of life. You become a participant in your own life. You pass from the known into the unknown. You embrace uncertainty.

Challenge

Step 4: Take a personal inventory.
Step 5: Admit what I found.

You take a courageous and honest look at yourself. You investigate your past and mistakes you made. You list your strengths and weaknesses. You admit what you find. You proceed with honesty and courage. This may be the most difficult challenge you ever face.

Revelation

Step 6: Be ready to change.

"Revelation" is gaining hidden knowledge.[48] You realize your protective behaviors and coping mechanisms keep you stuck. You become completely ready to change. You accept that you must give something up to gain something better. This is the death of your old way of life.

Transformation

Step 7: Humbly ask for change.

Change happens here. The catalyst is humility. Without humility, change does not happen. You cannot fake humility because the lack of humility is ego, and ego blocks change. You humbly ask your Higher Power to help you do what you cannot do for yourself.[49] This is transformation.

Atonement

Step 8. List the harm I caused.
Step 9. Make amends where possible.

---

48 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revelation
49 AA World Services, Inc, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p71

Once in popular use,[50] the etymology of "atonement" is "at one-ment," or "union with God".[51] To fix mistakes you made and heal harm you caused is a noble and courageous act. Working the Steps is an opportunity to clean up your past and work toward a better future. Whether or not you believe in a system of cosmic justice, at some level you know when you cause harm. You cannot move on until you address these issues as best you can.

Return Home

Step 10: Continue my inventory.
Step 11: Pray and meditate for guidance.
Step 12: Make the world better.

You feel a sense of freedom and connection. With newly acquired knowledge and wisdom, you try to live each day well. You take a daily inventory. You strengthen your relationship with your Higher Power. And you make the world a better place.

The 12 Steps and the Hero's Journey are complementary models for change. With the monomyth providing a broad overview, the Steps are guidelines to making change happen. They provide a structure to implement knowledge and wisdom.

And yet the 12 Steps are only suggestions.[52] They are guidelines on how to conduct your life. You need knowledge to do that in a practical way. Knowledge provides the building blocks of change. You need wisdom for inspiration, connection, and growth. Wisdom fuels change through psychological and spiritual transformation. Knowledge without wisdom lacks perspective. Wisdom without knowledge is hollow and ineffectual.

You will never exhaust the knowledge and wisdom you can use to live well and make your life better. Never stop learning. The Knowledge and Wisdom sections act as the seeds and reminders of those things you need for continued personal growth.

Knowledge

The Knowledge section is composed of articles containing practical information. Some of the articles deal directly with the Steps, and others contain more generalized, but still useful, information. You will find practical help on improving your life and dealing with others. You will learn how to make better decisions, form positive habits, and more.

The section is designed in such a way that you will have practical information available as you need it. The tools you need to work the Steps on your Hero's Journey will literally be in your hand. Nor will you have to worry about keeping a pile of reference books. The information you need will be there tomorrow, a year from now, or in five years. All you need to do is review it and put it into practice.

---

[50] htps://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=atonement&year_start= 1800&year_ end=2022&corpus=en&smoothing=3

[51] https://www.etymonline.com/word/atonement

[52] Bill Wilson, "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age", 1957

Wisdom

The Wisdom section may seem less practical, but it is no less important. The first book, "Leaves of Life", provides daily readings to inspire and motivate you on your journey. Use these readings (or others of your choice) as the basis for building a daily routine.

Following "Leaves of Life", six ancient texts provide inspiration and guidance. The intent of the Steps is clearly visible within them. The monomyth pattern is also discernable, especially in the Gospel of Matthew.

You may be surprised how much you enjoy reading these books of wisdom. They are interesting, in and of themselves. The more you read them, the more you will get from them. If you find yourself stuck in some situation to which there is no simple solution, read these books with careful diligence. There is a good chance you will find an answer to your problem.

The Circle and Triangle

In the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, the symbol of a triangle within a circle was used in AA literature. It was officially adopted by AA in 1955.[53] The triangle represented unity, service, and recovery, and is still seen on AA medallions. The circle represented wholeness, or the unity of AA. It was later dropped as an official symbol and is no longer used on AA literature.[54] The circle and triangle formed a powerful symbol for AA.

I use a more elaborate version as a concise summary of these ideas: the Penrose triangle[55] is the synergy of the 12 Steps, Knowledge, and Wisdom; the circle circumscribing it is Ouroboros,[56] representing the Hero's Journey cyclic nature of death and rebirth.[57]

At the corners of the triangle are the three relationships you must maintain for optimum health: your Higher Power, yourself, and others. These three levels of relationship represent all of your connections to life and existence.

The innermost symbol is the cognitive triangle: think, feel, act. It represents the interdependent nature of your thoughts, emotions, and behavior. If you can change any part of this triangle, you can change your life! The cognitive triangle is discussed in Doing, Mind, and Emotion.

Finally, at the center of the symbol is a simple, common phrase. "You are here," is a statement encountered on maps and diagrams, indicating your precise location within a larger context.[58] It brings a sense of reassurance and clarity. It relates the map directly to the territory.

---

[53] http://friendsofbillw.net/the_three_legacies

[54] https://www.aacle.org/whatever-happened-to-the-circle-and-triangle/

[55] Penrose triangle, Wikipedia, retrieved 20 January 2020

[56] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouroboros

[57] See Previous, "How Many Times Do You Work the Steps?"

[58] I researched all sorts of symbols, and all seemed either trivial or pretentious. I finally asked my Higher Power and it came to me that this phrase must be nearly universal in one form or another, and it is not only practical, but makes the symbol personal.

In a spiritual or psychological sense, "You Are Here," serves as a reminder to be mindful of the present moment, encouraging introspection and a deeper connection with yourself. In a philosophical framework, "You Are Here," carries existential weight, urging you to confront the reality of your existence and the inherent freedom and responsibility that come with it.

Wherever you are on your journey, it is your journey, and you are the hero. It is your story. It is not selfish to acknowledge that you are at the center of your own universe. How could it be otherwise? You are a spark of consciousness floating within a Great Unknown.

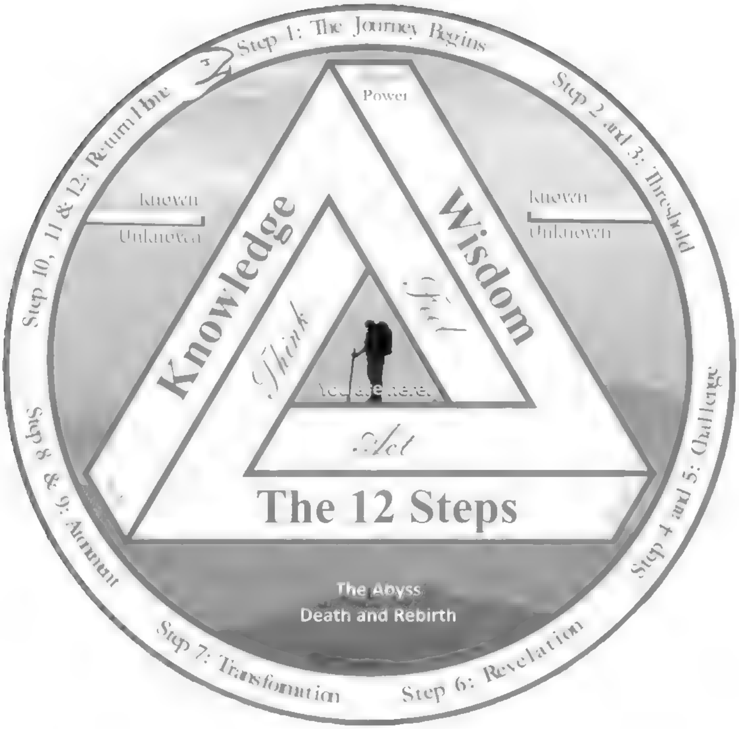
You can embrace Reality, or you can deny it, but I assure you that not choosing is still making a choice. Whenever you feel lost or adrift in the maelstrom that life can sometimes be, just look down at your feet and say to yourself, "You Are Here."

No matter where you go… there you are.

--The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai
Across the 8th Dimension (1984)

12 Steps to a Good Life

The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge and Wisdom


Step 1: The Journey Begins
Power
Step 2 and 3: Threshold
Known
Unknown
Known
Unknown
Step 10, 11 & 12: Return Home
Knowledge
Wisdom
Think
Feel
You are here.
Act
The 12 Steps
Step 4 and 5: Challenge
Step 8 & 9: Atonement
The Abyss
Death and Rebirth
Step 7: Transformation
Step 6: Revelation

2.1 Step 1: Life Is Unmanageable

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single footstep.

--Lao Tzu

[Change begins with a] beautiful desperation.

--Kim, AA Member

The charmèd sunset lingered low adown
In the red West; through mountain clefts the dale
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
Bordered with palm, and many a winding vale
And meadow, set with slender galingale;
A land where all things always seemed the same!
And round about the keel with faces pale,
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave
To each, but whoso did receive of them
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;
And deep-asleep he seemed, yet all awake,
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

--Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Lotos-Eaters"

Step 1 Discussion

Tennyson's melancholy lines refer to the ancient Hero's Journey of Odysseus. They tell of an island where the inhabitants dream their days away in a drugged reverie. The flowers of the lotus produce an illusion so powerful that they waste their lives indulging it.

In Part 1.2, I discussed in broad terms what makes a good life. But that discussion was prefaced with a simple statement, "Unhappiness stems from failed expectations and a gross misunderstanding of reality." That is the raw and unfiltered truth you must unflinchingly face in beginning your journey. It is the bitter red pill[1] you must swallow to free yourself from the nefarious illusion of control.

---

[1] A reference from "The Matrix", 1999

2.1 Step 1: Life Is Unmanageable

Think of yourself in a fragile bubble, floating through a vast and uncertain cosmos. This is the control you actually possess. It is only the illusion of control, because the inside of the bubble is mirrored, so that your awareness is focused solely on your own affairs. And, while the terrors of an infinite and eternal universe are hidden from you, so is the perpetual wonder, and boundless beauty, of the trillions of stars you travel among.

You make a choice each day, to either accept reality as it is, or to live your day in a trance, beguiled by fiction. Resisting reality causes suffering.[2] Living in reality requires a conscious acknowledgment of its joys and tears, and a willingness to endure uncertainty. Such a step is momentous and frightening. This is Step 1:

Life is unmanageable.

Unmanageability is the quality of being difficult or impossible to control.[3] It is part of life, something everyone inevitably faces. It is neither good nor bad; it is simply how things are. Sometimes, things do not go as planned, and you cannot control everything. Unmanageability is a facet of reality, and from it you can learn, adapt, and grow. But, since unmanageability, and the uncertainty that accompanies it makes you uncomfortable, you learn to tell yourself stories that hide or diminish this obvious truth.

Narratives and expectations separate you from the beautiful complexities of the real world. Acknowledging this fact peels back layers of self-deception. It is transformative, inviting you to relinquish the futile pursuit of control and revel in an unpredictable adventure. You may disagree. But if you examine your own life closely, you can find many fortuitous events that happened to you outside of, or even despite, your plans and control.

Positive Aspects of Unmanageability

Unexpected Opportunities: Life's unpredictability can open doors to unexpected opportunities, new experiences, and personal growth.

Spontaneous Joy: Spontaneous happiness can arise unexpectedly, reminding you that not everything is planned or controlled.

Serendipitous Connections: Chance encounters and meaningful connections occur with people who become significant in your life.

Personal Growth through Challenges: Facing unforeseen challenges can be a catalyst for personal growth and inner strength.

Creative Inspiration: Sparks of creative inspiration lead to innovative ideas and artistic expressions.

Unexpected Acts of Kindness: When other people display unexpected kindness, it reinforces your sense of interconnectedness.

---

[2] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/packing-success/202011/the-powerful-practice-accepting-reality

[3] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/unmanageable

Discovery of Hidden Talents: You discover hidden talents and capabilities that may have otherwise remained undiscovered.

Surprise Achievements: Life's twists and turns sometimes lead to surprising achievements, challenging notions of what is possible.

Adaptation and Resilience: The unmanageability of life encourages you to adapt and build resilience in the face of adversity.

Learning from Mistakes: Making mistakes may serve as valuable lessons, contributing to personal wisdom and maturity.

There are also, of course, negative examples of life's unmanageability, situations and events that take place despite your desires or expectations:

Negative Aspects of Unmanageability

Unexpected Loss: Life's unexpected personal losses, such as the passing of loved ones, cause profound grief.

Financial Setbacks: Economic uncertainties and unforeseen financial setbacks can disrupt stability and security in your life.

Health Challenges: Unpredictable health issues can arise, causing fear, creating dependence on others, and dashing long-term goals or routines.

Unforeseen Disasters: Natural disasters and emergencies can upend your life, your family, and your community, causing severe distress.

Relationship Struggles: Chaos in your relationships can lead to conflicts and problems that are difficult to understand and cope with.

Career Setbacks: Life's unmanageability can manifest in unexpected career setbacks, jeopardizing professional stability and long-term plans.

Mental Health Challenges: Unpredictable mental health issues can create internal struggles that are difficult to control or anticipate.

Unexpected Obstacles: Life presents unforeseen obstacles that hinder progress and challenge your personal and professional goals.

Legal Challenges: Unforeseen legal issues can introduce complexities and uncertainties into your life, causing stress and financial obligations.

Natural Changes and Aging: Normal life circumstances bring about unavoidable changes, forcing you to adapt to new realities.

In a world that worships control, predictability, and progress, the idea of viewing unmanageability as a philosophy may seem counterintuitive, even unsettling. But at the heart of this philosophy is the seed of spiritual growth. By accepting the unmanageable and unpredictable nature of life,[4] you not only embrace a fundamental truth of existence, but unlock a door to deeper wisdom and spiritual enrichment.

---

[4] https://news.stanford.edu/report/2020/11/04/living-with-uncertainty/

2.1 Step 1: Life Is Unmanageable

Much of your anxiety and distress springs from the deep-seated illusion that life can and should be under your direct control.[5] You structure your days with "shoulds" and "have tos" to wall out the messy chaos of real life. This desire for control is born of fear… fear of the unknown, the unexpected, and the undesired. But the only certainty in life is change,[6] and it is most often unscheduled, unwelcome, and above all, uncompromising. That is the nature of life. This simple fact presents a choice: acceptance or denial.

Spiritual traditions, especially for those in recovery, speak of surrender, not as a form of defeat, but as an act of courage.[7] To view life as unmanageable is to stand at the edge of a great abyss, and know that life is too complex for you to understand. It marks a shift away from ego-driven striving to a search for something greater than yourself.

Seeing life as unmanageable teaches you humility. It softens the hard edges of your expectations and offers alternative outcomes. Humility becomes a key element of spiritual growth. It springs from understanding your place in the world; it teaches you to make your plans in pencil. It creates a space for guidance from forces greater than yourself.

Benefits of Accepting Unmanageability

Acknowledging the Truth: Accepting life's unpredictability aligns you with reality. This is not surrendering to chaos but simply understanding the complexity of existence. You can live in real life, or you can face disappointment and heartache in your dream world.

Acceptance of Impermanence: A corollary to the unmanageability of life is acceptance of its impermanence[8] and unpredictability.[9] This acceptance frees you from unnecessary stress and frustration caused by trying to control every aspect of existence.

Humility and Openness to Learning: Understanding that life is unmanageable develops humility by forcing you to see the limits of your control.[10] Such humility, hard-earned, encourages you to remain open to new experiences, and learn from setbacks and disappointments.

Focus on Internal Development: When external circumstances are beyond your control, internal flexibility and self-compassion are even more important.[11] This means managing your responses, emotions, and attitudes toward life's challenges for inner strength and stability.

---

[5] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/202012/how-fear-the-unknown-influences-decision-making
[6] https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20200930-why-embracing-change-is-the-key-to-a-good-life
[7] https://spiritualawakeningprocess.com/2011/08/what-is-spiritual-surrender.html
[8] https://positivepsychology.com/impermanence/
[9] https://www.wisdomtimes.com/blog/how-to-accept-unpredictable-life/
[10] https://www.metricaddiction.com/post/step-one-admitting-powerlessness-and-unmanageability
[11] https://positivepsychology.com/circles-of-influence/

Adaptability and Resilience: Embracing the unmanageable nature of life encourages adaptability.[12] Instead of resisting change, you learn to accommodate uncertainties and setbacks, adapting your attitudes and actions to overcome obstacles.

Freedom from Perfectionism: The acknowledgment that life is unmanageable frees you from chasing perfection.[13] Rather than striving for a controlled ideal, you allow yourself to find contentment in the messy, unpredictable, and imperfect aspects of existence.

Mindfulness and Present Moment Awareness: Recognizing the unmanageable nature of life encourages mindfulness,[14] being fully present in the current moment. When you focus on the present, you experience a deeper appreciation for each moment. You find meaning and joy amid life's uncertainties.

Personal Growth: The perspective that "life is unmanageable" provides a realistic foundation for a personal philosophy. It encourages acceptance, humility, adaptability, resilience, freedom from perfectionism, and a focus on internal control and mindfulness. These qualities contribute to a balanced and fulfilling approach to life.[15]

Viewing life through the lens of unmanageability is an invitation to trust. Trust is a cornerstone of faith and spirituality. It is born from the relinquishment of control; it is faith in motion. Trust lets you interpret the twists and turns of life as part of a greater journey to spiritual wholeness. It acknowledges that there is a pattern, even in seeming chaos; that there is meaning, purpose, and a divine order in the universe.

Adopting unmanageability as the cornerstone of your personal philosophy is a compelling invitation to spiritual growth. It is a four-square adoption of the truth of existence. Abandon your futile grasp of control. Develop humility, faith, and trust. Reframe chaos into transformation. Refine your spirit, open your heart, and increase your capacity for connection. By accepting unmanageability, you learn to manage yourself more effectively, not through exertion but through grace, wisdom, and divine surrender.

Step 1 Summary

Life is unmanageable. Unhappiness is caused by misunderstanding reality. Your expectations blind you to life’s complexities. Embrace its joys and challenges and endure its uncertainties. Trust in the divine order of the universe, see the pattern in chaos, and find meaning and purpose. Let go of control. Develop humility, faith, and trust. These qualities transform chaos into growth, refine your spirit, and enhance your capacity for connection. By accepting life’s unmanageability, you learn to manage yourself better.

---

[12] https://medium.com/illumination/embracing-change-life-lessons-in-adaptability-and-resilience-c7f9e3846f6f

[13] https://medium.com/illumination/embracing-change-life-lessons-in-adaptability-and-resilience-c7f9e3846f6f

[14] https://news.stanford.edu/report/2020/11/04/living-with-uncertainty/

[15] https://news.stanford.edu/report/2020/11/04/living-with-uncertainty/

2.1 Step 1: Life Is Unmanageable

Step 1 Prayer[16]

God, Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind, Spirit of Nature or Spirit of the Universe, my name is ______, I know and accept that my life is unmanageable, and I need your help today. Amen.

Step 1 Connections

Hero's Journey Connection: The Journey Begins

Often, the motivation to change is the result of inner turmoil that you see only indirectly.[17] Disappointment and disillusionment can run as deeply as "the soul itself". The desire to change, to live better, connects you to something greater: the "opening of a destiny."

Knowledge Connections

Worldviews p. 135; Self-Assessment Exercises p. 141

Creating a Daily Routine p. 244

Wisdom Connections

Ench[001]- Ench[003], Matthew 10:29-10:31, Dhammapada 277-279

Note: Wisdom connections for the Steps are my interpretations. Yours may be different. Do not limit yourself to what I think. Find verses that support your understanding.

Step 1 Work

1. From the Positive Aspects of Unmanageability, find examples in your life where circumstances beyond your control worked out for the best.

2. From the Negative Aspects of Unmanageability, list examples where negative events happened despite your best efforts. Discuss what you did and how you handled them.

3. From the Benefits of Accepting Unmanageability, examine how developing these qualities might be more beneficial than trying to sustain the illusion of control.

4. Track your own instances of unmanageability. When something unexpected happens, positive or negative, write it down. Say to yourself, "Yes, life really is unmanageable and I embrace that!" Review your list any time you need to be reminded of life's unmanageability. (See Powerlessness and Unmanageable Items p. 176)

---

[16] Based on https://club12.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Prayers-of-AA-Long-Vers.pdf The Step 1 prayer is inspired from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, Page 10-12, Ch. 3, Page 46

[17] Joseph Campbell, "Hero with a Thousand Faces", p 46

2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

More is unknown than is known. We know how much dark energy there is because we know how it affects the universe's expansion. Other than that, it is a complete mystery. But it is an important mystery. It turns out that roughly 68% of the universe is dark energy. Dark matter makes up about 27%. The rest - everything on Earth, everything ever observed with all of our instruments, all normal matter - adds up to less than 5% of the universe. Come to think of it, maybe it shouldn't be called "normal" matter at all, since it is such a small fraction of the universe.

--NASA[1]

Step 2 Discussion

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century mathematician and philosopher, made a simple and elegant point concerning how we should live. It is called "Pascal's Wager".[2] In the religious terms of his time, he said that an individual should assume that God exists and live accordingly. If there is no God, one has lived well and lost nothing. If God exists, then the individual gains salvation.

The NASA quote above makes a similar point concerning human ignorance.[3] Despite acknowledged scientific bewilderment concerning 95% of the material universe, most people remain closed-minded concerning its composition and attributes. Unlike Pascal, they wager the 5% is all there is.

During consideration of this chapter, my original goal was to present sufficient evidence for you to arrive at spiritual conclusions like my own. Such an approach would have made for tedious reading. Worse, had I been successful, I would have robbed you of your own spiritual journey. There is no shortage of religious proselytizing; you will not find that here.

True spirituality can only be found at a personal level. It can be hinted or pointed at, but spiritual experience is not a commodity to be shared, bought, or sold. It is as personal as your beating heart, as intimate as your next breath.

You may question the need for spirituality or a Higher Power. After all, you have been doing fine without them. But in every major field of knowledge, there is evidence that human beings seek and require a sense of the spiritual.[4] This belief may be in a monotheistic God, or gods, or some more diverse and diffuse principle.[5]

---

1 From https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pascal's_wager

3 And it appears that what we do not know continues to outpace what we do: https://www.sciencealert.com/dark-energy-may-not-exist-something-stranger-might-explain-the-universe

4 https://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/12/believe

5 https://www.nature.com/news/complex-societies-evolved-without-belief-in-all-powerful-deity-1.17040

2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

Before proceeding further, let us dispense with two troubling subjects that cause conflict and confusion regarding spirituality. These are orthodox religion and the word, "God".

First, religion. Historically and today, the malfeasance of organized religion itself provides the stones thrown by its detractors. Corruption, cruelty, greed, and institutionalized sexual abuse are evidence brought against it. But religion is a straw man, easy to defeat, because religions are human institutions. They are thus prone to the same failings as any human institution. It is faulty logic to suggest the problems of orthodox religions are evidence against spirituality. Religion may provide social structure to spiritual life, but spirituality exists with or without dogma and catechisms.

In reference to the terminology of a supreme being, "God", I am reminded of the medieval question of, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?"[6] Confusion arose because angels were defined as real but incorporeal beings. If they existed, such beings would occupy no space at all.

In a similar vein is this logical paradox: "If God is all powerful, can he create a rock so heavy that he cannot lift it?"[7] If he creates the rock as defined, then he cannot lift it. However, if he can lift it, he did not create it as defined. In either case, if logic is sound, God is not all powerful.

And another: "God is either all powerful or all good, but not both."[8] The statement meaning, if God is all good, he would stop wars, famine, and suffering. Since those terrible things obviously still exist, he either cannot or will not stop them. So, there is only one logical conclusion, God is either all good but not all powerful, or all powerful but not all good.

A valuable mental tool is the Zen term, "mu".[9] Simply put, it means the answer is larger than the question. You can frame a question in terms of yes-or-no, but that does not mean "yes" or "no" is sufficient. You can define something that should be true, or you want to be true, but that does not mean it is. The paradoxes of God are perfect examples.

As the Buddha taught,[10] such discussions are a pointless waste of time. They are children's word games that distract us from what is important: personal growth and living well.

Those who wish to believe in a certain God are forced into mental gyrations explaining why their God allows war, illness, death, and crime. If these beliefs were not enforced by fear, one could easily see the irreconcilable inconsistencies within them. And yet, they are not proof that a spiritual world does not exist, but rather that a proper understanding of it is lacking.

---

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_many_angels_can_dance_on_the_head_of_a_pin?

[7] https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/693352/jewish/Can-Gd-Create-a-Rock-Thats-Too-Heavy-for-Him-to-Lift-Longer-Version.htm

[8] Martin Cohen, "Critical Thinking Skills for Dummies", p333

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mu_(negative)#Interpretations

[10] https://meda.foundation/power-of-silence-why-buddha-refused-to-answer-lifes-biggest-questions/

2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

Confusion results from linguistic artifacts in how you define a thing. The definition becomes the reality. The map becomes the territory.[11] That is how you get lost. You think words are reality, but they are only clumsy representations, like a child's drawing of her real-life house and family.

The finger that points at the moon is not the moon.

--Zen Proverb

If there is a paradox in how you understand the world, the error is not in the world, but in your understanding of it. You must decide if you would rather accept a God defined by other people,[12] or find your own path to something greater than yourself.

I am one of many who use the term "Higher Power" as a spiritual focus. It lacks the baggage of negative connotations many people find uncomfortable in the word "God." Since it is defined by everyone according to their own understanding, it is not merely a substitution or back-door approach to religion. It is an individualized approach to spirituality. It is freedom.

This idea of a Higher Power is well explained by the philosopher and psychologist William James,

> … *the practical needs and experiences of religion seem to me sufficiently met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite; it need not be solitary. It might conceivably even be only a larger and more godlike self…*[13]

So, your Higher Power could be a higher, better self, or a future self who has solved your current problems. It could be your unconscious mind working on your behalf. It could be an oversoul, a guardian angel, or a spiritual or psychological mentor. It could be the God of your youth, or the God you know but understand in a new way.

You might think of your Higher Power as the genius of your inner wisdom.[14] A Higher Power often appears in human affairs as luck, chance, or coincidence.[15] Only you can choose the concept of God (or a Higher Power) that works for you.

---

[11] A quote by Alfred Skarbek is, "The map is not the territory," meaning that language is only representative of reality, not reality itself. It is similar to a Zen aphorism, "The finger that points at the moon is not the moon.", See Wisdom, ZenT[077]

[12] Voltaire said, "In the beginning, God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since."

[13] William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", William James, 1905, p 405

[14] Mel Robbins, "The 5 Second Rule", 2017

[15] Paraphrased from "Daily Reflections," AA World Services, Inc., 1990, p83

2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

When I first got sober, my Higher Power was the guidance of a counselor and a doctor. I knew they were smarter than me, they cared about me, and they could help me. I was incapable of considering anything higher than that. They were the Higher Power I needed at the time.

I read of a woman whose Higher Power was represented by a tree in her back yard. Washing dishes in her kitchen, she could look out the window and feel connected to the grandeur and peace of nature through that tree.

I know a man whose Higher Power is the collective wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous. He has over 30 years of sobriety. I know another man whose Higher Power is "better decision making." It works for him.

I knew a woman whose Higher Power was a kind of spiritual magic. She said her life was filled with miracles.

Our understanding of a Higher Power can change over time, even day to day. My Higher Power is now akin to an embodiment or representative of Divinity; a being I can talk to and ask for guidance. At other times I find it to be more like the Tao, a guiding Principle that makes the universe work.

Perhaps I have given the impression that a Higher Power is some arbitrary hook on which to hang your spiritual hat. But a Higher Power is not something you make up and then pretend is real. Lip service to nothing starves the soul.

William Blake wrote,

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
and Eternity in an hour.

A Higher Power is a mental and spiritual "space" you create in your living and thinking. You empty your teacup so it can be filled.[16] Your Higher Power has meaning to you, and perhaps only to you. It can be a physical place, an emotional state, meditative contemplation, or any number of things. What flows into this space, then, is the real "whatever is out there."[17] Beyond limited human comprehension, it is something greater than yourself.

As air flows into a vacuum, your Higher Power fills the space you create for it. If the space is small, so is your connection to it. If the space is large, your Higher Power takes a bigger role.[18]

Your concept of a Higher Power can change and evolve over time because you change and evolve. Your Higher Power is the living core of your life. It does not dispense arbitrary gifts and punishment from somewhere high in the sky, but flows from within you, outward.[19]

---

16 See Wisdom, Zen[078]
17 https://www.innerpeacefellowship.org/ewExternalFiles/HowToKnowWhateverCreatedLife.pdf
18https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Practice_of_the_Presence_of_God#Theme
19 Luke 17:21: "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (KJV)

2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

Shakespeare eloquently said, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."[20] The linguistic tag we hang on a thing does not affect what that thing is, only our perception of it. But we usually get this idea backwards. We define the thing and then bemoan the fact that it does not behave as we wish.

It is not the label of the thing that is important, but the thing in itself.[21] Call your Higher Power what you will, but simply know it is something greater than yourself, and has your best interests in mind. That is all you need to begin. Do not confuse religious dogma and arbitrary definitions of "God" with the internal sense of sacredness that is available to us all.

My need to have a specific visualization of my Higher Power is my need, my ego, and does not come from my Higher Power. My Higher Power is what it is; the desire to define or visualize it comes from within me, not outside me. It is the uncertainty of uncertainty. And that is fear, and fear only widens the gap between me and my Higher Power.

--TA

Start with an open mind and heart. Openness leads to a more sacred existence. The path to your Higher Power is a sacred path. Do not be lazy; do not take the easy way and buy into a prefab God.[22] Find your Higher Power and let it find you.

Spiritual wisdom tells us that gratitude and awe can light the way on our journey.[23] Scientific research supports this claim.[24] Gratitude and awe are complementary emotions which literally change your brain.[25] They are positive states conducive to feelings of joy, openness, and generosity.

The philosopher Cicero said, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others."[26] Gratitude can be learned and practiced. By doing so, we open ourselves to other positive, healthy emotions.

---

[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ A_rose_by_any_other_ name_would_smell_as_sweet

[21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thing-in-itself

[22] Most of people prefer the easy way. See Doing, Habits.

[23] Two disparate, of many, examples are: Rudolph Otto, in The Idea of the Holy, 1917, believed that human beings sense a "numinous" power that can inspire dread, awe, and humility. In The Path of The Bodhisattva, 1995, a Zen text published in the magazine Mind Moon Circle, Subhana Barzaghi says we should be "bowing with gratitude for our daily bread and cheese," because it is a virtuous act on the path to realization.

[24] UC Davis psychologist Robert Emmons suggests gratitude is important because it allows us to gain perspective and deal with crisis situations. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/ article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times, Retrieved 21 Jan 2020 Andy Tix, says in an article for Psychology Today that feelings of awe often precede spiritual experience. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-pursuit-peace /201711/awe-in-religious-and-spiritual-experience, Retrieved 21 January 2020

[25] Awe: Neural Basis of Dispositional Awe, Frontiers in Behavioral Science, https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00209/full?utm_source=F-NTF&utm_medium=EMLX&utm_campaign=PRD_FEOPS_20170000_ARTICLE, Gratitude: How Awe Sharpens Our Brains, Greater Good Magazine, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_awe_sharpens_our_brains

[26] https://aeon.co/ideas/the-fast-track-to-a-life-well-lived-is-feeling-grateful

2.2 Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

Experiences of awe have been shown to inhibit the Default Mode Network (DMN) of the brain.[27] The DMN is associated with worry, stress, and self-criticism. Feelings of awe reduce our sense of self and make us feel part of a greater whole.

This is Step 2:

Acceptance: Be more open to what you do not know than focus on what you think you know. In Hamlet, Shakespeare tells us, "There are more things in heaven and Earth… than are dreamt of in your philosophy."[28] Accept that you will never know everything, that you will never have all the answers. Acceptance of uncertainty opens your mind to a Higher Power.

Gratitude: Gratitude is a learned skill of willingness and practice. Looking for things to be grateful for is not only a steppingstone to deeper spirituality, but a worthwhile end in itself. Gratitude for those things you take for granted now makes life better.[29]

Awe: Find awe in your life. Awe beneficially changes your nervous system, reduces focus on yourself, increases sociability, and provides a sense of meaning.[30] To be in awe is to know your place in the universe. Through awe, you experience the beauty and grandeur of existence. It is a humbling experience. It can be terrifying. Open yourself up. Look beyond your safe space. See what really is. That is where you find awe.

Take your time on Step 2, but do not tarry to the point you lose your way. You do not need a concrete and airtight definition of what your Higher Power is. Sometimes, the simple notion of a caring, greater "something" is enough. Let the details fill themselves in.

'The more you focus on something — whether that's math or auto racing or football or God — the more that becomes your reality, the more it becomes written into the neural connections of your brain…

--Dr. Andrew Newberg

Remember, your Higher Power:

Is something other than your conscious self.
Is greater or smarter or more powerful.
Cares about you.
Is large enough to trust for the next step.

Some final words regarding other people's use of the word "God":

When reading or talking to others, I mentally substitute "Higher Power" for terms like "God". This frees me of the baggage those words carry for me but still allows me to relate to what I read or conversations I have.

---

[27] https://www.mindful.org/what-awe-looks-like-in-the-brain
[28] https://nosweatshakespeare.com/quotes/famous/there-are-more-things-in-heaven-and-earth/
[29] Christine A. Adams, "Gratitude Therapy", p 2
[30] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10018061/

Spiritual and religious topics can be sensitive, even for those who only pay lip service to their beliefs. However, they may take offense when you use the term "Higher Power" instead of "God." Remember, everyone is on their own journey.

There is no need for you to be insistent on terminology. You are not more spiritually evolved simply because you use a term like "Higher Power." Be respectful of others' beliefs, even if you do not share them.

Also, do not disregard true wisdom and spirituality because it addresses the divine aspect of the universe as "God", "Yahweh", or something similar. Historically, those were the only terms available or were used when translating sacred texts to English. The books in the Wisdom section use these terms. They are no less valuable or beautiful because of it. Do not shy away from words but view them in the proper context.

If you use a term like "Higher Power" (as I do), that is for your own spiritual development. The rest of the world, and historical references, need not change their traditional terms for your convenience or comfort.

Step 2 Summary

Your spiritual nature seeks something greater than yourself that cares about you. Your Higher Power is not limited by a word or definition. Find an understanding that works for you. Open yourself to your Higher Power with acceptance, gratitude, and awe.

Step 2 Prayer[31]

God, I am standing at the turning point right now. Give me your protection and care as I abandon myself to you and give up my old ways and my old ideas just for today. Amen.

Step 2 Connections

Hero's Journey Connection: Crossing the Threshold

You prepare to travel beyond the limits of the life you know into the unknown. You are afraid, "And yet - it is only by advancing beyond those bounds… [that you pass] into a new zone of experience"[32]

Knowledge Connections

Awe p. 371; Gratitude p. 375; Spiritual Self-Assessment p. 375; Finding Your Higher Power p. 388; Spiritual Practice p. 389

Wisdom Connections

Matt[020], TaoT[009], Prov[026]

---

31 Inspired by AA World Services, Inc, "Alcoholics Anonymous", 2001, p59
32 Joseph Campbell, "Hero with a Thousand Faces", p 75

Step 2 Work

1. Acceptance is adjusting to reality, whatever it is. That means acknowledging and embracing the circumstances or situations without resistance or denial. It is a process of finding peace and contentment by letting go of expectations and allowing yourself to adapt to the present moment. Think about something in your life that irritates or bothers you, but you cannot change, at least for now. It could be traffic on your commute, taxes or paperwork, your boss, or your neighbor's barking dog. Now, write down as many ways as you can think of to accept and make peace with this situation. This could include focusing on the present moment instead of dwelling on the annoyance. Or find ways to reframe the situation and view it from a different perspective. Regardless of your final answers, the important point is to stop resisting and start accepting.

2. Gratitude is an affirmation of goodness, while recognizing that the source of that goodness is outside yourself.[33] Write down one thing you are glad for that is not the result of your own efforts. Think not of material goods so much as family members, friends, beloved pets, or experiences you had that changed your life. Think of your senses (sight, hearing), mobility (your limbs), and needs filled (food, shelter), even consciousness or existence itself. Describe what you are grateful for, and why.

Note: There are two traps to gratitude:
1. Why me? Why have I been blessed and not someone else?
2. If I have/know/achieved this, anyone could.

Gratitude is thankfulness (appreciation) of what IS. If you dilute it by tacking on numerous levels of qualifications and 'what ifs', it ceases to be gratitude.

3. Awe is a feeling of reverence inspired by something majestic, powerful, or exceptionally beautiful, sometimes mixed with wonder and dread, or even fear.[34] Write about the last time you felt a sense of awe. How long ago was it? What inspired it? Were you frightened? Were your mind and spirit expanded by the experience? Did your life feel larger or more real because of it? Are you awed by the very large or small? Nature? Mountains? Oceans? Stars in the sky? Your own existence? Think of an experience you can call to mind that fills you with awe. Do you feel wonder or fear, and why? Describe it in detail.

4. Work the exercise "Knowledge-Spirit, Finding Your Higher Power, A Practical Exercise". Keep in mind the ideas of William James in your consideration: something other than your conscious self, greater or smarter or more powerful than you, cares about you, is large enough to trust for the next step. This is all you need to be open to a Higher Power.

---

33 https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude/definition
34 https://www.wordnik.com/words/awe

2.2½ The Unofficial Step 2½:
Finding a Higher Power

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.

--[Attributed to] Teilhard de Chardin

You are looking with, what you are looking for.

--Ronnie, AA Member

A Higher Power

It struck me that in many versions of the Steps, including this one, Step 2 is about being open to, or coming to believe in, something greater than yourself. And Step 3 is turning your will and life over to "God as you understand Him," or here, relying on your Higher Power.

I discussed how a Higher Power can be external. In the beginning, you might use a recovery group, critical thinking, or some other external entity or group as your Higher Power. As I said, my first Higher Power was a counselor and a doctor. Use what works for you. Eventually, most people seek a Higher Power of a more ethereal nature. It is in our makeup to do so. When that time comes, you will want to know how to find your spiritual Higher Power.

It is a leap from being open to a Higher Power to relying on it. If your Higher Power is rationality, or a recovery group, it is not so difficult. But if you seek a Higher Power of the spiritual type, then where, and how, does this Higher Power appear? How do you find it? What is it? How do you know it is real?

This chapter presents an informal discussion of finding a higher spiritual power. If you already found your Higher Power, great! But if you are still wandering about in confusion, read on.

Wherefore art thou Higher Power?

I felt clever using the phrase above. Imagine my cleverness compounded when I discovered that "wherefore" does not mean "where," but "why".[1] The question is then, "Why are you, Higher Power?" So, let us begin there.

The quest for knowledge of a spiritual Higher Power is more prevalent, historically, than the recent trend to dismiss it. Though the god or gods have varied, all human cultures have been influenced by belief in deities or supernatural beings.[2]

---

[1] https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/wherefore-meaning-shakespeare

[2] https://www.nature.com/news/complex-societies-evolved-without-belief-in-all-powerful-deity-1.17040, Retrieved 18 May 2020

Atheism, the lack of belief in deities, is not of recent origin, either. But the belief in God was so prevalent until the 18th century that nonbelievers were rare.[3]

Of course, the weight of all human history does not constitute proof of anything. Nor does the fact that even Neanderthals buried their dead, implying spiritual belief of some kind.[4] All it proves is that ancient peoples believed in something that exists beyond pure physicality.

Or is that all? I am not one to follow the crowd, but if I am walking in one direction and 100 billion people[5] are going the other way, I might at least pause to see if they know something I do not. It is the height of arrogance to dismiss such a large component of human existence as ignorant superstition.

Herbert Spencer said, "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance, that principle is contempt prior to investigation."[6]

Nor does rationalism prohibit belief in a nonmaterial component of reality. The argument can be made that if reality is defined by strict materialism, then rationalism itself would not be possible.[7]

Many people believe science leaves no room for a spiritual presence. But there are other ways of knowing than scientific reductionism. Science explains a lot, but there is valid knowledge outside the scientific purview. Spiritual knowledge is neither scientific nor unscientific. It is nonscientific, personal, and experiential.

A scientist can explain how your eyes see color. Another can teach you the physics of light refraction. And yet another could tell you how your brain processes sensory information. But none of that comes close to the incredible subjective beauty of seeing a rainbow. Do you want scientists to explain rainbows… or would you rather see one yourself?

A Spiritual Higher Power

I propose there is something of a spiritual nature that has worth in its own right. It is the "pearl of great price."[8] At the core of the various religions there is, or at least once was, something necessary to the human condition.[9] This knowledge, or experience, has value without reference to external attributes. Like seeing a rainbow, it is to be desired for its own sake.

---

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism, Retrieved 18 May 2020

[4] https://www.archaeology.org/issues/125-1403/trenches/1797-france-neanderthal-cave-burial, Retrieved 18 May 2020

[5] The estimated total number of people who have ever live on Earth before 1950, https://www.prb.org/howmanypeoplehaveeverlivedonearth/, Retrieved 18 May 2020

[6] Appendix II of Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939

[7] https://evolutionnews.org/2020/07/why-science-and-atheism-dont-mix

[8] See Matthew 13:46 in Wisdom

[9] Alduous Huxley, "The Perennial Philosophy", 1947

This spiritual knowledge has, for the most part, been lost.[10] Such loss brings dire results. I do not need to list statistical data for the current rates of depression and anxiety in the world. You can see it for yourself. To our detriment, the world teeters on nihilism.

Therefore, if we can shine a light into the dark corners of life, we are better for it. This is the light of spiritual experience. It is available to everyone as a personal manifestation of a Higher Power. There are many reasons to seek a spiritual Higher Power.

1. Spirituality is necessary to your personal development and happiness. That is why it has long been part of mythological and religious history. The guidance through personal crises that spirituality provides has been stripped away by modern culture. Joseph Campbell, author of "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," puts it this way, "There can be no question: the psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today (in so far as we are unbelievers, or, if believers, in so far as our inherited beliefs fail to represent the real problems of contemporary life) must face alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not often very effective guidance. This is our problem as modern, 'enlightened' individuals, for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence."[11]

2. Having a Higher Power changes your life in ways that are difficult to imagine or describe. As Dorothy's worldview changed from sepia to color in the movie, "The Wizard of Oz",[12] spirituality adds vibrant depth to your life. William James called these changes "the fruits of the spiritual tree." He said, "the fundamental feature in the spiritual life [is] the sense of Presence of a higher and friendly Power." From another author, he quoted, "the disappearance of all fear from one's life, the quite indescribable and inexplicable feeling of an inner security, which one can only experience, but which, …one can never forget."[13]

3. Communing with a Higher Power brings meaning and purpose to your life. Aldous Huxley, author and philosopher, wrote, "The divine Ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought, but (in certain circumstances) susceptible of being directly experienced and realized by the human being. This Absolute is the God-without-form of Hindu and Christian mystical phraseology. The last end of man, the ultimate reason for human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground…"[14]

---

[10] Alvin Boyd Kuhn, "The Root of All Religion", 1936

[11] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with A Thousand Faces", 1949, 1968, p96

[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6D8PAGelN8, Retrieved 25 May 2020

[13] William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", 1902, p214-215

[14] Alduous Huxley, "The Perennial Philosophy", 1947, p 29

4. Having a Higher Power is an inescapable attribute of being human. You may not recognize or admit this. But it is true, and you are better off choosing one that will benefit you. David Wallace spoke of this in terms of "worship". He said:

There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things—if they are where you tap real meaning in life—then you will never have enough… Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly… Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid… Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.[15]

5. There is a sublime mystery open to you. Lying at the root of existence, it points to a fundamental reality. It is there, but you must find it for yourself. In his book, "Comparing Religions," Jeffrey J. Kripal says, "…the modern study of religion has been driven by a kind of ping-pong movement between… belief and reason… [A discussion] that must conclude either on the side of faith and its revealed doctrines or on the side of reason and its materialist and mechanistic conclusions." But he goes on to explain, "[The] …nature and history [of religious phenomena] … cannot be fully explained by human reason, that something else or more, and often something truly fantastic, seems to be shining through."[16] To find a Higher Power is to see the rainbow for its own sake… because it is beautiful, and you can.

Your Spiritual Higher Power

Trying to define God is a fool's errand. --Dave, AA Member

In "The Varieties of Religious Experience," William James tells us, "If the grace of God miraculously operates, it probably operates through the subliminal door, then. But just how anything operates in this region is still unexplained… leaving it, if you like, a good deal of a psychological or theological mystery…"[17]

To seek a Higher Power of a spiritual nature is to embrace profound mystery. There are many paths to spirituality, and thus to finding your Higher Power. Do not limit yourself; find a path that works for you.[18]

Ask for help in the morning, say thank you at night.
You don't even have to know what you are praying to.

--Felecia, AA Member [Paraphrased]

---

[15] https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/article/famous-author-there-no-such-thing-atheism, Retrieved 22 Sep 2019

[16] Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Comparing Religions", 2014, p367

[17] William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", 1902, p211-212

[18] https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/features/view/27713/spiritual-practice-toolkit Retrieved Dec 12, 2024

2.3 Step 3: Rely on My Higher Power

The most important decision we make is whether we believe we live in a friendly or hostile universe.

--[Attributed to] Albert Einstein

Step 3 Discussion

This quote may seem like an odd introduction, yet the subject is meaningful. Albert Camus expressed a similar sentiment, though in darker terms.[1] He noted the absurdity of living with full awareness of our ultimate dissolution.

Life is painful at times. Distraction delays, but does not prevent, tragedy. We may lose love, money, or status. We may be betrayed, robbed, or injured. If there is a bell curve of suffering, you may be one of the lucky few unscarred by misfortune. But suffering is ubiquitous, and sooner or later it finds us. Ultimately, we all face the final unknown: death.

But the question remains. Do you believe the universe is friendly? Most lack the courage to consider such a question. The answer has serious psychological and philosophical implications. If the universe is not friendly to your existence, it is either cold and indifferent or overtly hostile. Both alternatives lead to despair.

Whether through necessity or logic, a hospitable universe is the only possibility that allows for an orderly existence of meaning and purpose.[2] A friendly universe implies some characteristic that makes it that way. It need not be a conscious intelligence; it could be a fortunate accident.[3] It could simply be an attribute of existence that underlies order and an opportunity to live well.[4] It could be a God or gods, or a facet of consciousness not yet understood.

You have a decision to make. Either there is some compassionate power in the universe you can rely on, or there is not. By relying on your Higher Power, you leave your old life and ways behind. If you have reached this point and still have no idea of what your Higher Power may be, consider revisiting Step 1 and Step 2.

---

[1] In the Myth of Sisyphus: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest… are games…"

[2] Based on the idea of a "fine tuned universe": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fine-tuned_universe

[3] From the "anthropic principle": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropic_principle

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panpsychism#Contemporary

2.3 Step 3: Rely on My Higher Power

Step 3 asks you to embrace the uncertainty and the joy of existence. To "rely on" means to depend confidently and to put trust in.[5] As you work Step 3, what was "a" Higher Power becomes "my" Higher Power. You acknowledge a relationship between you and the transcendent aspect of the universe. You cease trying to create reality and instead, participate in what is.

Relying on your Higher Power will not:

Win the lottery.
Cure sickness.
Avoid accidents.
Change the laws of physics.
Grant wishes.
Find your true love.
Guarantee happiness.

Relying on your Higher Power will help you:

Make better financial decisions.
Create a healthy lifestyle.
Think things through.
See new opportunities.
Decide what is important.
Have healthier relationships.
Find true peace and contentment.

Relying on your Higher Power does not create miracles. You are the miracle! Step 3 lets you experience that. It is a portal to change. A Higher Power can do for you what you cannot do for yourself.[6] If this were not so, you would have no need of self-development. You would decide to live a good life, and it would happen.

However, neither you nor life is that simple. It is not a question of willpower, but reality. There is a solution. Relying on your Higher Power allows you to make steady improvement in all areas of your life. If Step 3 is akin to a mythical doorway to a new life, then you would expect a price to be paid. There is a price, but you will find it easy to pay and worth the cost.[7] The price is that you are willing to sincerely and persistently try.

Step 3 aligns your will and life with a friendly universe. It is finding and accepting your purpose and place in the cosmic scheme of things. It is being and doing your best. In existential terminology, Step 3 is living an authentic life.[8] In religious terms, it is doing God's will.[9] To the ancient Greeks, it was eudaimonia.[10] In Taoism, it is following The Way.[11]

---

[5] https://www.dictionary.com/browse/rely
[6] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, Chap 5, "How It Works": "…we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives; …probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism; …God could and would if He were sought."
[7] See Wisdom, Matthew 11:28-30
[8] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/authenticity
[9] See Wisdom, The Gospel of Matthew, 6:10
[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudaimonia
[11] See Wisdom, "The Tao Te Ching"

2.3 Step 3: Rely on My Higher Power

By working Step 3, you establish a harmonious relationship with reality. It aligns your goals with a higher order. Life has meaning when you live in a meaningful way. Step 3 is giving over life's myriad problems to your Higher Power. It is letting go. Turning over. Releasing. There are specific and practical ways to begin.

Once again, your Higher Power need not be a God or spiritual being. It only needs to be something greater than yourself with your best interests in mind. For example, have you ever asked a close friend for advice? Doing so means you respect their wisdom and believe they can and will give you proper guidance. Your friend becomes a temporary higher power for you.[12]

Your Higher Power works in just this manner. You need help, you ask for help, and you rely on the guidance you receive. (Remember, my first higher power was the support I received from a doctor and a counselor.) Over time, through this reliance, your Higher Power becomes a welcome presence in your life. You depend on it for comfort, guidance, and wisdom.

The thought process for approaching Step 3 rationally consists of four specific actions:[13]

1. As I mentioned in 1.1 My Story, I believed I could solve my problems by finding a solution and then applying willpower. I thought I could fix things if I worked hard enough. I just needed to "try harder." Most people believe the same thing. Look at your life and your problems and determine if that is what you believe.

2. Now look at the results other people achieve through this approach. Everywhere around you people live in fear, anger, and disappointment. People you know, and know of, try to solve their problems through intelligence, common sense, and willpower. Society tells us this is the right way to live. But if you look at the ongoing problems we face personally, and as a society, it is obvious that such an approach does not work as well as we wish to believe, and have been told.

3. The realistic solution to many of life's problems is reliance on a Higher Power. Contrary to common belief, such reliance can make you more independent of spirit. There are only two requirements to develop such a reliance:

a. You must be willing to try. Willingness is the single most important component to completing Step 3. Without willingness, your chances of success on Step 3 are nil.

b. You focus less on your own will and become open to accepting guidance and wisdom from another source. It is your will which blocks the entry of a Higher Power into your life. Your will is your ego at work. Relaxing your will gets your ego out of the way.

---

[12] For readability and to avoid confusion, I adopted the convention of "higher power" (no caps) for reliance on non-spiritual guidance, and "Higher Power" (capitalized) for that which I believe has a spiritual component.

[13] AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", pp 36-40

I realize that "willing to try" and "relaxing your will" seem contradictory. This is a result of the clumsiness of using language to describe a skill or state that is nonverbal. Have you ever explained to someone how to ride a bike, swim, or drive a car? Language only goes so far. After that, you must be willing to try, and then let go and allow it to happen.

4. The final step is giving your Higher Power permission to help you. Once you realize that misuse or overuse of the will complicates everything, you begin to align yourself with higher ideals. At this point, the understanding of your Higher Power that you developed in Step 2 comes into play. You must let go of your will, your problems, and your overwhelming desire to control the outcome of everything. You must consciously give permission to your Higher Power to help you.

Step 3 assumes there is goodness in the universe and that you can ally yourself with it. To do so, you put aside trivial and selfish pursuits in favor of activity supporting a higher purpose. This is an important difference between working the Steps and other kinds of self-improvement. In the Steps, your goal is not confined to self-interest. Rather, you become better so you can make the world better.

The wording of Step 3 matters less than the intent. You begin to rely less on your egoic self and more on something greater. Find the phrase that works best for you. Here are some examples:

Rely on my Higher Power.
Find my true purpose.
Align myself with a higher good.
Live authentically.
Follow the Path.
Give myself to my Higher Power.

How to Take Step 3

Step 3 begins with a shift in how you approach problems. Instead of relying only on willpower and effort, you consider that something larger than yourself can help. Without willingness, nothing changes. If you are closed to the possibility of a Higher Power offering support, you remain stuck.

Once you are willing to try, begin letting go of your need to control everything. This does not mean you stop taking action or stop caring about outcomes. It means stepping back and allowing things to unfold, instead of trying to force them. It can feel uncomfortable, especially when your mind is used to pushing through problems with sheer determination. But when you let go of that constant need for control, you start to make room for new solutions and insights that you would not otherwise have access to.

The next part of Step 3 requires giving your Higher Power permission to help you. This does not mean you become passive. It is the ability to acknowledge that there is guidance available and allowing that guidance to flow into your life.

You do not need to understand exactly how it works; you just need to let go of the constant need to be in charge and trust that something greater can help you find the way. This is where trust and patience come into play, because the results will not always be immediate. But as you loosen your grip, you will notice that things start to change for the better.

Step 3 brings a real and noticeable shift in focus. Aligning with your Higher Power opens your awareness outward. You make choices that reflect a broader and healthier point of view. You do not sacrifice your individuality but make it more authentic. Your life has meaning. It becomes richer, more immediate, and more significant.

I recommend that after you spend some time considering Step 3 and what it means to you, that you take it in the form of a prayer. Find some time alone, and say the Step 3 prayer below, or something similar. Do not be afraid or feel silly to kneel when you pray in private. Make it real. Mean what you say. Be as sincere, authentic, and humble as you can at that time.

Once you complete Step 3 in the most thorough manner possible, take a moment to look at your progress:

1. You accepted that life is unmanageable.
2. With an open mind, you came to know your Higher Power.
3. You rely on your Higher Power to help you.

Step 1 through Step 3 form a cycle, or loop. Step 1 leads directly to Step 2, and Step 2 to Step 3. Step 3 then lends strength and insight to Step 1. This process becomes part of your daily routine. It is the solid foundation upon which you work the remaining Steps.

Step 3 Summary

Step 3 shifts from relying solely on willpower and effort to trusting in a Higher Power for guidance. It begins with the willingness to try something different, recognizing that a force greater than yourself can offer support. This step asks you to release the need to control everything and to allow events to unfold. This is not passivity. It is acknowledgment that wisdom is available and openness to it. By giving your Higher Power permission to help, you align yourself with a greater purpose, moving beyond selfish goals and making choices that benefit others. This shift leads to a life of meaning, authenticity, and peace, with each step reinforcing and deepening your reliance on the Higher Power.

Step 3 Prayer[14]

God, I offer myself to you, to shape and guide me as you see fit. Free me from the chains of my ego so I can more fully know and follow your will. Help me move through my struggles with ease, that others may see your presence in me.

---

[14] Based on: AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p63, 3rd Step Prayer

2.3 Step 3: Rely on My Higher Power

Step 3 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connection: Crossing the Threshold

Relying on your Higher Power does not limit but frees you. You cross over into a new way of thinking, a new way of life. Passing from the known into the unknown, you embrace uncertainty. "As the rising smoke of an offering through the sun door, so goes the hero, released from ego, through the walls of the world…"[15]

Knowledge Connections

About Doing p. 191; Spiritual Practice p. 389

Wisdom Connections

Ench[031], Matt[020], TaoT[007]

Step 3 Work

1. Write a mini biography of yourself. Beginning with your birth, list major life events where the outcomes could have been worse but turned out in your favor. Also list those events that were difficult, but from which you gained wisdom and experience.

2. Examine your present circumstances (without comparison to others). If the universe was truly hostile to your existence, would you have food, shelter, and air to breathe? Would you exist at all? Do you find any evidence in your circumstances to indicate that the universe is friendly toward you? Describe that evidence in detail.

3. Given that pain and tragedy are unavoidable, can you learn to give up anxiety and control and rely on your Higher Power? How does that work? What does it look like? If your Higher Power changed you for the better, would that make your life better?

---

[15] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p 82

2.4 Step 4: Take an Inventory

Why do I have to dig all this stuff up… why can't I just go on with life?

--Bree, AA Member

…what if we could look within and see the source of our more troubling emotions and why they drive our behavior, often against our own wishes? … What if we could find out what causes us to lie about who we are…?

Being able to understand more clearly that stranger within us would help us to realize that it is not a stranger at all but very much a part of ourselves, and that we are far more mysterious, complex, and interesting than we had imagined. And with that awareness we would be able to break the negative patterns in our lives, stop making excuses for ourselves, and gain better control of what we do and what happens to us.

--Robert Greene, "The Laws of Human Nature"

Know thyself.

--Ancient Greek Aphorism

Step 4 Discussion

Step 4 is an intimate self-inventory. It is a detailed and sober look at yourself. It investigates the causes and conditions that translate needs into behaviors. Step 4 makes you aware that the chains that bind you, and the demons that drive you, are of your own making.

Many people say Step 4 is "the hardest thing I ever did."[1] I agree, at least the first time through. But the rewards exceed the difficulties.

When working the Steps, most people stumble or quit at Step 4.[2] Some prefer the dark of ignorance to the light of self-discovery. They are not doomed to unhappiness. They may still live positive, useful lives. But wherever they go, their hungry ghosts[3] will follow them.

On the other hand, if you have courage, you can look within. Like the heroes of myth, you will travel to hidden mystical realms and return with new knowledge. That knowledge does not guarantee positive change. But with the right tools, it becomes the raw material and the basis of change.

The inner journey shows itself in memories, emotions, and patterns that rise to the surface when you look honestly. What once seemed random or meaningless begins to reveal a structure. You see how fear, pride, or wounded desire has shaped choices, and how different choices can now be made. In this way, self-knowledge is not only discovery but also direction.

---

[1] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, et al, "The Path to Serenity", 1991, p17

[2] This is anecdotal, from my personal experience and others in recovery.

[3] This is an analogy, not a direct reference, to the "hungry ghosts" of Buddhism. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungry_ghost

2.4 Step 4: Take an Inventory

Step 4 Overview

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck was a French naturalist who lived from 1744 to 1829.[4] He was the first person to establish that an organism adapts in response to its environment. Lamarck believed that all organisms tailor their behavior based on their needs, within the context of their environment.

You, too, are an organism, albeit of vast complexity. Like other organisms, you tailor your behavior based on your needs within your environment. Because you are complex, however, it is often difficult to understand your behavior and the needs that drive it.[5] Here are some examples:

- Losing your temper for no clear reason
- Shopping to feel better
- Eating when you are not hungry
- Procrastination
- Problematic drinking, drugging, gambling, or sex
- Long-term resentments or grudges
- Manipulating or being manipulated
- Problems with authority
- Chaotic, destructive relationships
- Financial issues; overspending

Perhaps you experience these or similar behaviors only occasionally, or at some reduced and seemingly manageable level. Let us assume that you do not experience extremes of either behavior or emotion. It is still likely that you would benefit from increased self-knowledge.

Consider your current problems and shortcomings. Life becomes richer when you stop self-sabotage. Freed from psychological, spiritual, and behavioral baggage, you live better.

Step 4 is the investigation of the issues that hold you back, tie you down, or mess you up. It begins the healing process, identifying those deep wounds in your soul to be cared for and treated. It is also the identification of your strengths and positive attributes. Paradoxically, they are sometimes the same.

Digging Deep in Step 4

People are apprehensive of Step 4 because they fear what they will find. It deals with issues that may involve shame, guilt, and fear. It pulls the scab off festering wounds and shows you things about yourself you would rather deny. And yet, Step 4 is only an investigation of how you fill your needs.

Step 4 is personal, yet your perspective should be impersonal. Develop objectivity. Approach it like a technician running tests or an accountant balancing books. Step 4 is an inventory, not an inquisition; an audit, not an exorcism. You are examining causes and conditions, not tabulating sins.

---

[4] Richard Robinson, Edit., "Biology Volume 3", Macmillan Reference

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalization_(psychology)

Self-inventory is not finding blame in other people or what they did to you. It concerns only your thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and motivations. You are looking for self-knowledge.

As you work on your inventory, you are looking for patterns of thought and behavior. You do not need hundreds of entries. You only need sufficient examples of an issue to adequately represent or define it. This is not a "rap sheet" or indictment. It is a fact-finding exercise. Brutally logging every incident where you felt resentful, fearful, or hurt someone becomes perverse grandiosity. It is not helpful.

Do not, however, shy away from an issue because it makes you uncomfortable. Work with persistence and diligence. A thorough inventory is necessary for personal growth and continued progress.

Keep your inventory private. Friendships have been lost and relationships ended because of misunderstood or unwisely shared inventories. If you share your inventory, be sure the person you share it with is trustworthy and understands what you are trying to do.

A Word of Caution

Before beginning your Step 4, carefully review Steps 1 through 3. Make sure you have worked them thoroughly. Without a strong spiritual foundation, the pain of reviewing all your old anger, fears, trauma, and resentments can be destructive.[6]

There are good reasons for caution. Nietzsche said, "…if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you."[7] Unhealthy fascination can motivate extended self-examination, which is detrimental. It becomes ego-driven navel-gazing.[8] The result can be painful or make your situation worse.

Use common sense. You can easily do an inventory by yourself, but your first Step 4 can be difficult and confusing. I recommend you have a mentor, counselor, clergy, or someone familiar with the Steps to help you through it. I know it is hard to ask for help, but this suggestion is based on personal experience and the observation of others in their Step work. It is easy to schedule a few sessions with a counselor or clergy. You will be glad you did.

I did my first Step 4 alone. I was arrogant and foolish. It was a devastating mistake. I wallowed in guilt, depression, and self-hatred. I took "a misshapen and painful pleasure" through my "pride in reverse".[9] I drank heavily for years afterward. Do not make the same mistake.

There is a limit to "self-help." Believing you can fix, or even identify, all of your problems on your own is part of the problem. If you need help, have courage and keep looking until you find it.

---

[6] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, et al, "The Path to Serenity", 1991, p86

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil", 1886

[8] https://markmanson.net/self-awareness

[9] The A.A. Grapevine and Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", 2001, p45

2.4 Step 4: Take an Inventory

Doing the Inventory

The inventory for Step 4 is called the Long Self-Inventory Format. You can find it in Knowledge-Being (There is also a short format). The process is broken down into manageable chunks you can work on a little at a time.

Take your time but have courage and be persistent. Completing the Long Self-Inventory Format can be a challenging but rewarding process. It allows you to gain a deeper understanding of yourself and your values.

The format is designed to be tackled in small pieces, so do not feel overwhelmed by the length of the inventory. Take your time. Approach each section with an open mind. Be honest with yourself and do not shy away from difficult questions.

Have courage, because it can be uncomfortable to confront certain aspects of yourself. However, persistence is key. Do not give up if you find yourself struggling with a particular section. By completing this inventory, you will gain valuable insights into your strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth. Enjoy this journey of self-discovery!

Step 4 Notes

A few years ago, I participated in a Step 4 workshop. These are notes I presented, slightly modified. They represent the common points people often forget when working Step 4. You will notice some redundancy. Sometimes repeating an idea often, in different ways, helps to clarify it.

Before you work Step 4, do Step 1-3 thoroughly. Read and understand this chapter and the long inventory format.

Work with a sponsor, counselor, or spiritual advisor on Step 4, at least the first time. If you work the steps multiple times you will get the hang of it, but it is important to have guidance the first time.

Always take a quiet moment to ask your Higher Power for the courage and perseverance to do this Step as completely and thoroughly as possible.

It takes *courage* to do a thorough 4th Step. This follows the ancient maxim of "Know thyself".[10] Step 4 is looking into the deepest (and sometimes, darkest) parts of yourself. Most people do not have the courage, or they are constitutionally incapable of being honest.[11] When people quit the Steps, it is often on Step 4. When you work on Step 4 honestly and sincerely, pat yourself on the back for having the courage and determination to do so.

Think of Step 4 like a detective investigating a case. The object is *not* to relive all these events, but to find the causes and conditions that led to your thoughts, feelings, and behavior.[12]

---

10 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_thyself

11 AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, Chap 5 "How It Works"

12 AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p45

2.4 Step 4: Take an Inventory

Do not write a book on what a horrible person you are. If you stole 50 candy bars in your life, you do not have to list every incident. But you do need to list *why you stole candy bars*! It is not the number of incidents that matter so much as what were the *causes* and *conditions* that made you want to steal.

Step 4 has three main subjects: People, Institutions, and Principles.[13] Step 4 has three main categories: Resentments, Fear, Personal/Sex Relations.[14] Step 4 examines four "affects my" areas: self-esteem, security, ambitions (control), and personal/sex relations.[15]

Look for how you were affected and how you responded: your thoughts, feelings, and actions, not who did it or what they did. If you have a problem with Step 4, go back and work Step 3 again.

There are no *rules* on how to do Step 4. Look for causes and conditions, nothing more and nothing less. You can write in a notebook, make your own format, your own form, or whatever you want to do. What matters is dispassionately understanding the causes and conditions of your past thoughts, feelings, and behavior. And do not forget the positive things, too.

You can split up guidance for Step 4 (and doing Step 5). You can discuss some issues with your sponsor, others with a counselor, and still others with a spiritual advisor. There are no rules that say all the work has to be done with one person, as long as *all the work is done and done as thoroughly as possible*!

While working on Step 4, most people mentally jump ahead and think, "how can I tell anyone about this?" and "how will I make these amends?" Do not make this mistake. The Steps are designed to be worked in order. Jumping ahead before you are prepared produces fear and frustration. When working Step 4, work only Step 4.

If you get too emotional while working on Step 4, STOP! Take a break or wait until you can talk to your sponsor, counselor, or advisor.

Be as thorough as possible and take as much time as you need. There is no deadline or time limit, although procrastinating probably indicates fear.

You might find or remember more things when you are finished with your Step 4 that "should" have been included. This is normal. Be as thorough as you possibly can, leaving nothing out, to the best that your abilities, insight, and memory allow.

Keep your Step 4 private. Once out, you can never get it back. Share your Step 4 writings only with your sponsor, counselor, advisor, or the trusted person you choose for Step 5.

When you have been as exhaustive and thorough as possible, feel a sense of completion and accomplishment, have prayed about it, and your mentor or counselor agrees, then you are finished with Step 4.

---

[13] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p64
[14] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p64-71
[15] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p67

2.4 Step 4: Take an Inventory

Step 4 Summary[16]

In Step 4 you are looking for the good in yourself, as well as self-defeating behaviors and patterns, guilt, anger, shame, and fear. Honest examination of yourself exposes the internal blocks to loving yourself, loving others, and allowing yourself to be loved. The healing process can then begin.

Step 4 Prayer[17]

God, help me to honestly take stock. Help me to search out the flaws in my make-up which caused my failure. Help me to resolutely look for my own mistakes and to understand where I had been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened. Please help me to be searching and fearless in my endeavor to write my inventory. Amen.

Step 4 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connection: Challenge

Now you have crossed a threshold. You are "undertaking a perilous journey into the darkness by intentionally descending… into your own spiritual labyrinth".[18] You move into "a dream landscape [to] survive a succession of trials."[19] The trials of Step 4 are fearlessly confronting the demons and ghosts of anger and fear born from your past experiences.

Knowledge Connections:

Long Self-Inventory Format p. 178

Wisdom Connections:

Ench[029], Matt[022], Dham[023,024]

Step 4 Work

1. Find a mentor, especially for your first Step 4. This can be a counselor, therapist, clergy, or someone familiar with the Steps that you trust. Pick up your phone and make the calls.

2. Do the Long Format (or, if necessary, the Short Format) Self-Inventory in Knowledge-Being. Take your time, be thorough and objective.

3. Remind yourself of the courage it takes to do Step 4. Take pride in your efforts to heal and live a good life. If you experience depression, anxiety, or guilt on your Step 4, stop immediately and get professional help. There is no shame in doing so.

---

[16] Paraphrase of Melody Beatty, “Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps”, p74-75
[17] http://friendsofbillw.net/twelve_step_prayers
[18] Paraphrased: Joseph Campbell, "Hero with a Thousand Faces", p 93
[19] Joseph Campbell, "Hero with a Thousand Faces", p 89

2.5 Step 5: Admit What I Found

For we are all in some way or other kept asunder by our secrets; and instead of seeking through confession to bridge the abysses that separate us from one another, we choose the easy by-way of deceptive opinions and illusions.

--C.G. Jung

You are as sick as your secrets.

--Recovery Slogan

… *the reason you're so against doing it is the reason you need to do it.*

--Larry, AA Member

Step 5 Discussion

Working the Steps sometimes feels contrary to your instincts.[1] You want to protect your ego, and Step 5 is letting go of your ego. It is one of the hardest things to do, but it is important for living a good life. The mistakes, errors, and character flaws you found in Step 4 isolate you. Having seen how your wrong thinking and actions have hurt yourself and others, it is important to stop living alone with the demons and fears of your past. Admitting the results of your inventory frees you from this "burden of moral exile."[2]

Fear and reluctance to complete this Step can be strong. You may be tempted to skip it or water it down. That would be a mistake. Holding back on Step 5 will cause you more trouble than you might think. If your Step 5 is flawed, then so will be the rest of your Step work.

In Step 5, you learn humility. Humility is a clear understanding of who you really are, followed by a sincere effort to be better. So, the first step you can take toward humility is to recognize where you fall short. You cannot fix a problem if you do not know what it is. Step 4 identifies your problems, but completing the inventory is not enough.

You saw in Step 4 those times where you were resentful, or hurtful, or wallowing in self-pity. But even though that may have been a humiliating experience, it does not mean you gained humility. Though your flaws are now known, they are still there. Something must be done about them, and you cannot wish or will them away by yourself.

If you really want to know the truth about yourself, you need help from your Higher Power and another person. You improve through honesty and humility by admitting your flaws without holding back.

---

1 AA World Services, Inc., "The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", 2001, p55
2 Carl G. Jung, "Modern Man in Search of a Soul", p35

2.5 Step 5: Admit What I Found

There are three levels of connection every human being requires: your real and authentic self, a power greater than yourself, and other human beings.[3] In a proper Step 5, you connect with all three. You break down the walls that keep you isolated. You admit to yourself, your Higher Power, and another human being, honestly and fearlessly, what you found in your Step 4 inventory.

Admit to Yourself

The first difficult thing required by Step 5 is to be as honest with yourself as currently possible. You have already completed much of this work in Step 4. By reviewing your Step 4, you remind yourself who you are, your values, your secrets, your mistakes, and your good points. You need to break past the lies you have been telling yourself up to this point. You need to be honest with yourself.

In early counseling, I took a battery of psychological tests. I was determined to be as honest as possible, because I was miserable and wanted to get better. One of these was a test to determine my degree of self-deception. When the results came back, my counselor said I scored 85%. I thought, "Great, that's a B." But she corrected me. She said I was lying to myself 85% of the time.

Although it may seem impossible to lie to yourself, the truth is that all humans are quite adept at it. René Descartes, the 17th century philosopher, gave us the idea that we are aware of the contents of our own minds.[4] This is a serious misconception. In truth, you are far less aware of what goes on in your mind than you think.[5] This gap is where self-deception takes place. Your mind filters the thoughts that enter your consciousness.[6] It produces cognitive distortions that separate you from reality.[7]

Before continuing with your Step 5, review your inventory and ask yourself if you have been as honest and thorough as possible to this point. If your answer is "yes," then continue with the Step.

Admit to Your Higher Power

In Step 5, you become completely open and honest with your Higher Power. Recall that your Higher Power is your representation of that which is greater than yourself. Your Higher Power cares about you.

When you are open, honest, and receptive to your Higher Power, you attain a higher level of spirituality. Opening yourself to your Higher Power is not a display of weakness. It is aligning yourself with that which is good and noble within you. It is turning toward your authentic self and your true purpose. It is committing to a good life.

---

[3] Russell Brand, “Recovery”, Step 5
[4] David Livingstone Smith, “Natural Born Liars”, “Scientific American – Mind”, Vol 16, Number 5, 2005, p21
[5] Mortimer J. Adler, “Ten Philosophical Mistakes”, “Consciousness and Its Objects”
[6] David Livingstone Smith, “Natural Born Liars”, “Scientific American – Mind”, Vol 16, Number 5, 2005, p21
[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_distortion

You admit the results of your inventory to your Higher Power through prayer. It is helpful to pray, or have a moment of silence, with the person hearing your Step 5 before you begin. If you have chosen the right person, they will have no problem with this. They may even initiate a prayer on their own.

However, if you prefer to take this part of Step 5 alone, you can find a quiet place before you begin. Whether alone or with another person, it is important to set the stage for your Step 5 with a prayer.

To your Higher Power, say something like this, "Help me have the courage to admit my mistakes and problems, and all my fears, resentments, and shame. I have been as honest and thorough as I know how to be. When I speak this Step out loud to another person, I will be admitting all these things to myself, and you. Thank you for this opportunity to heal and be relieved of these burdens."[8]

Admit to Another Person

You may ask why it is not sufficient to admit your inventory to your Higher Power and leave it at that. Speaking to your Higher Power is not as difficult as speaking to another person. If you do not actually sit down and talk out loud about what you have been hiding for so long, your willingness to improve is merely an elaborate self-deception. When you are honest with another person, it proves your intentions are sincere.

Another reason to speak with someone in person is that your perception of your inventory may be distorted by your own rationalizations and desires. When you share with someone in person, you get their feedback and advice on your inventory.

In spiritual matters, going it alone is dangerous.[9] Persons of wisdom and humility confirm guidance from their Higher Power with other people[10] This is to prevent mistakes arising from their own ignorance or wishful thinking. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I."[11] Since you can be misled by ego and pride when speaking to your Higher Power, a compassionate second person is helpful in discerning the truth.

The practice of telling someone about your flaws is a very old spiritual tradition.[12] But the psychological benefits of sharing and confession have been recognized as well.[13] Not sharing secrets, such as traumatic events, can be as harmful as the events themselves.[14]

---

[8] Modeled on: http://therehab.com/learning/step-5-admitting-your-wrongs/

[9] AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p60

[10] AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p60

[11] Matthew 18:20

[12] James 5:16, "Therefore confess your sins to each other…"

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession#Psychology

[14] Brene Brown, Ph.D., "Daring Greatly", Chap 3

2.5 Step 5: Admit What I Found

Sharing your inventory with another person flips a kind of psychological switch you can rarely access any other way. Your self-concept is the result of combining your own perceptions of who you are with the perceptions of others.[15] The desire to hide your weaknesses from others is natural, and when you do, it is easier to hide them from yourself as well. Sharing your mistakes and defects with another person is often the most direct route to finding your authentic self.

Who Should Hear Your Step 5

You must identify a trustworthy individual. Be cautious in your choosing. You may have to reveal information about yourself that no one else should know. You will want to speak with someone who understands what you are trying to do and preferably (but not necessarily) has lived through similar situations. If you find someone you trust and feel a sense of kinship with, then this is a good choice.

Choosing a neighbor, friend, spouse, or other family member is not a good idea and may backfire. You want someone who can see your good points and lead you to self-compassion and self-acceptance.

Your decision rests on your willingness to be truthful and the degree to which you trust the person. Above all, you are looking for someone who is compassionate, trustworthy, and can refrain from judgment.

Even when you have found the right person, it can be difficult to approach them. It is best to ask in person, in a private conversation. Explain what you are trying to do and why you chose them to hear your Step 5. Be gracious in accepting their answer, even if they decline. If the answer is negative, do not be discouraged, but begin your search again.

Finding the Right Person[16]

If you are already in a 12 Step program, you can ask your sponsor or someone in your group to help you.

Many clergy have familiarity with the 12 Steps. Contact local churches and houses of worship to inquire.

Counselors, especially those specializing in addiction and recovery, are trained to listen without judgment, and can guide and assist you.

You can also check local recovery centers and Al-Anon groups.

Try an online search. I live in a small town in a rural area and found 20 counselors and therapists within easy travel distance. If you have no other option available, schedule an online session.

---

15 Patricia Farrel, Ph.D., "How to Be Your Own Therapist", p69

16 Partially from Melody Beattie's "Codependent's Guide to the Twelve Steps", Step 5

How to Do Your Step 5

Doing your Step 5 is simply keeping the appointment you made with the person you asked to hear it. Bring your written Step 4 or a summary of it with you. That is all you need. Begin the session with a prayer, if you choose, and thank the person for agreeing to help you. Then, admit to them what you found in your inventory.

A Step 5 will normally take about an hour, but you are not bound by that. If you need additional time, stay longer, or make another appointment. Hopefully, during this time, the person you are confiding in will be able to offer similar experiences, understanding, and insight into the events you describe. Listen carefully to comments they make and answer any questions as honestly as you can.

The most important thing in your Step 5 is to leave nothing out. Those events and memories that cause you the most fear, shame, and guilt are the ones it is most important to share with someone you trust! Holding back or hiding anything will make a lie of everything.

Splitting Your Step 5

It is possible you may want to cover your Step 5 with more than one person.[17] You may have legal issues to discuss with an attorney. Or, you may have moral or sexual issues you would be more comfortable discussing with an expert. I did a Step 5 in which I discussed certain issues with a counselor, and others with an individual I knew I could trust. This is an acceptable and practical way to make sure you cover everything you find in your Step 4 inventory.

What to Expect from Step 5

Most people find a great sense of relief after completing their Step 5. It is liberating to let go of the psychological and emotional baggage that has weighed you down. You will be amazed how great it feels when you have finally spoken everything out loud.

Many people report experiencing peace and tranquility for the first time in years. You may suddenly feel a sense of freedom that you never anticipated. That is because you have begun the healing process and, though difficult, it is necessary. This can be the beginning of a new life.

Although some people feel immediate relief, you may find this sense of relief does not arrive right away. This is true for many people. Though you may not feel any different, you will understand that this Step, like the others, has served its purpose. Even if you do not undergo a major emotional transformation, you will be able to continue in your Steps.

---

[17] Discussed in AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p61

2.5 Step 5: Admit What I Found

Layers of Honesty

In the earlier section, "Admit to Yourself", I described how I practiced self-deceit even when I tried not to. Humans are good at lying to themselves, often as a means of self-protection. You are probably pretty good at it, yourself.

Think of your mind as having many layers. By going through Step 4 and Step 5, you peel back a layer of truth. But beneath that layer are others that were not accessible to you until now. For example, I did a Step 4 and 5 on the gross defects that surrounded my alcoholism. Years later, I had to do another Step 4 and 5 on relationships because I discovered issues that I was not previously aware of. This is normal, and though the time span may be months or years, you will continue to find new truths about yourself.

Another common occurrence regarding your Step 5 is the feeling that you forgot to mention something, or that another issue came to mind after you were finished. This is also normal. You probably covered similar items in your inventory. If you have not omitted it on purpose, then you have done your best. Many issues that crop up after your Step 5 can be handled easily when you get to Step 10, or another Step 4 later.

Step 5 Alternatives

I wanted to include a section on how to conduct Step 5 even if you cannot find someone to hear it. You may be stranded on an uncharted island, or shy, or so filled with shame and regret you cannot imagine baring your soul to another person.

I once believed that by a certain stage of development, it is no longer necessary to speak to another person. You just "tell your Higher Power." I was obviously using the same self-deception that I hoped to warn you of earlier. This demonstrates how wily your ego (and mine) can be.

My self-deception became clear when I found myself suddenly confiding in someone I trusted.[18] I had not planned to do so, but the sense of relief I felt in a short conversation made me understand, once again, the desperate need of humans to connect and communicate.

There are no effective substitutes for speaking with another person when the inventory involves private, shame-laden, or sensitive matters. Speaking to someone face to face creates mental states you are unlikely to reach any other way.[19] We are hardwired to interact with each other.

You may find it difficult to find someone to hear your Step 5. Do not give up or use a short-cut or alternative method. You will be pleasantly surprised if you persist and complete this Step properly. A diligent search for the right person often causes that person to appear in your life.

---

[18] Thank you, Kim, AA Member!

[19] https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/hyperscans-show-how-brains-sync-as-people-interact/

One Exception

There is one exception to having another person hear your Step 5, although you must consider it carefully and honestly. I mentioned earlier that I had worked the Steps multiple times. For serious personal issues, such as alcohol abuse and relationships, I did my Step 5 with another person. However, when I quit smoking, I did not.

The litmus test to determine the difference is this: I could openly discuss my inventory concerning smoking with anyone. There was no fear or shame in talking about why I smoked, how I started, or why I wanted to quit. With my alcohol and relationship inventories, there were secrets, shame, and regret. These were things I would not easily confide in anyone. And that is the difference. If you can talk about it easily, you do not have to confide in another person. If you consider it to be a serious and private matter, then you should say it out loud to another person in Step 5. In other words, if you do not want to tell someone, then you probably need to.

Step 5 Summary

Your Step 5 is based on your Step 4 inventory. You admit to yourself, your Higher Power, and another human being the exact nature of your mistakes, fears, flaws, and resentments. Being honest in Step 5 provides a sense of relief and freedom. Completing it opens new layers of yourself to explore. There is no substitute for a thorough Step 5. Choose a trustworthy, compassionate person to hear it. There is one exception to having another person hear your Step 5. If you can talk about it with anyone, then you do not have to do a formal Step 5.

Step 5 Prayer[20]

God, help me admit to myself, to you, and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. Help me find the person who will keep my trust and show me compassion and understanding. Remove my pride and fear of this Step and show me how completing it will make me a better person so I can live a good life. Help me be honest and thorough so I can feel closer to you and make the world better. Amen.

Step 5 Connections:

The Hero's Journey Connection: Challenge

In the mythology of the Sámi[21] (called 'Lapps' in "The Hero with a Thousand Faces"), Joseph Campbell speaks of the tribal shaman who enters the land of the dead to recover the lost or abducted souls of the sick.[22] He says, "On his laborious journey… the shaman has to encounter and master a number of [difficult] obstacles... After he has wandered through dark forests and over massive ranges of mountains, where he occasionally comes across the bones of other shamans… who have died along the way, he reaches an opening in the ground… when the depths of the underworld… open before him…"

---

[20] Adapted from: http://friendsofbillw.net/twelve_step_prayers

[21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sámi

[22] Joseph Campbell, "Hero with a Thousand Faces", p 91

2.5 Step 5: Admit What I Found

In your Step 5, you enter your personal underworld to rescue your own lost soul. You take this journey with your Higher Power and another person to recover your authentic self. Although your ego will feel endangered, the benefits are real.

Knowledge Connections:

Thinking for Life p. 294; Types of Prayer p. 394; Relationships p. 425

Wisdom Connections:

Dham[022], Matt[007], Prov[094] 28:13

Step 5 Work

1. Review your Step 4. Be as honest and thorough as possible.

2. Find an understanding and trustworthy person. Have the courage to make the calls or ask for help. Speak to counselors, clergy, and recovery groups or centers. Do not fool yourself into thinking you can skip or substitute this part of Step 5.

3. Make an appointment to work your Step 5. Say a prayer. Do your best and leave nothing out. Listen to comments from the other person and answer questions as honestly as possible.

2.6 Step 6: Be Ready to Change

As it is, the best soul will initially need Herculean self-control to attain the clarity of perfect self-understanding, and it will require continual, high-level exertion and concentration to stay focused on the things that matter and to keep progressing in them… Yet such exertion is precisely what the healthy soul will come to cherish.

--Lorraine Smith Pangle
Virtue and Self-Control in Xenophon's Socratic Thought

Why wouldn't I be ready to let go of what's holding me back?

--Anonymous CODA member [paraphrased][1]

Step 6 Discussion

It is fair to ask, "Why would I not be ready to change?" You have, after all, accepted that life is unmanageable, embarked on a new spiritual life, examined yourself honestly, and admitted to yourself, your Higher Power, and another human being, everything that you found. Of course you are ready to change. Unless you are not.

In Part 1: Foundation, I discuss four simple ideas. The first two are:

1. We are driven by needs.
2. Our worldview distorts our needs.

You are motivated by needs deeply rooted in your physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional self. While you have a choice (and are responsible) for how these needs are expressed and filled, the needs themselves are primordial. Your human needs exist whether you admit them or not. Problems arise, as you have now seen in your own life, when your needs, drive, and instincts lead you to excess and error.[2]

Although I may use any number of terms, I prefer the truth which I learned in recovery: these are character defects. Such defects generally lie very close at hand because they are part of your thoughts, feelings, and behavior. For example, I have had anger issues since I was a child. When I felt hurt, abandoned, laughed at, or scared, I used anger to cover it up. Anger is a powerful emotion that incinerates everything in its path.

You developed your own character defects to protect yourself and to survive.[3] These coping mechanisms may no longer be helpful. They may in fact, be harmful. Yet they are still not easy to let go of.

---

[1] This quote marks a private event, the loss of a friendship, underscoring the lessons of Step 6, and a reminder to me of the need for compassion and tolerance.

[2] AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p65

[3] https://coda.activeboard.com/t45061854/step-study-step-6

2.6 Step 6: Be Ready to Change

Returning to my previous example, when I tried to let go of my anger, I was forced to feel the hurt and vulnerability I used anger to cover up. Like taking pain medication, the pain came back every time the medicine wore off. So, I stayed angry to feel the pain less. Eventually, anger was a habit I was dependent on and afraid to live without.

Recall the times you felt scared, hurt, ignored, shamed, or betrayed. Then place yourself inside the worldview you absorbed haphazardly from parents, peers, and media. The simple human needs you carry become distorted through the worldview you inherited and built on.

Trying to fill distorted needs is living from a fragmented center. Imagine a bus that gets lost and is abandoned by the driver. The passengers all want to go to the same place but argue and fight about how to get there.[4] Early on, your character defects tried to get you through life safely; now they do more harm than good.

A human soul that begins life, innocent and beautiful, can become broken and twisted. Over time, coping mechanisms multiply and needs get distorted. Eventually, defects of character become part of you like the fingers on your hand. It does not mean you are evil. You are human, and you can get better.

While the difficult nature of character defects lies in the comfort of their familiarity, the solution to that difficulty is in its realization. Just as you put aside the things of youth to reach adulthood, so can you let go of character defects once you understand that they are no longer useful. And while being ready to change does not automatically initiate change, it is the necessary precursor to the process.

How To Be Ready to Change

Your character defects, as previously stated, began as coping and defense mechanisms. They developed to protect you, your ego, your worldview, and any groups you consider yourself to be part of. As such, they are difficult to change. This is why you must be ready to change.

Step 6 is one end of a bridge that connects your old life to a new life. At this midpoint, you are halfway through your journey. If there is a doorway between your old self and your new self, Step 6 prepares you to walk through it. Miracles exist in the world; you are standing at the threshold of them now.

Because character defects are ingrained and often less than obvious, it is impossible to take this Step perfectly. You may believe you are prepared to have all of your flaws removed. But do not deceive yourself. Closer examination often reveals other flaws that you may not be ready to give up. It is not humanly possible to achieve perfection. The difference is whether your goals are selfish or aligned with a higher good.

Step 6 is challenging, but not impossible. You must first begin and then keep trying. The key is willingness to try. Pursue excellence, even while accepting that you cannot achieve perfection.

---

[4] Dayna Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", Chap 3

2.6 Step 6: Be Ready to Change

1. Examine: Look at the list of character defects you created in Step 4. These are the flaws, vulnerabilities, and difficulties that are preventing you from moving forward to a happy and more productive life.[5]

2. Release: Consider each of your character defects. Ask yourself if you are ready to give it up. Be as honest as possible. You may balk at letting go of some of them. In these cases, do not say to yourself, "I can never give this up!" Instead say, "I'm not sure I can give this up right now."[6]

Step 6 Summary

After completing the first five Steps, you may be sure you are ready to change. But your needs and instincts can lead you to excess and error. Character defects develop as coping mechanisms to protect you and may no longer be helpful but are difficult to let go of. Through this understanding, and willingness to change, you can move toward a new life. Step 6 is one end of the bridge that connects your old life to your new life; you are standing at the threshold of miracles. Be willing and ready to change, even though you know that perfection is impossible.

Step 6 Prayer[7]

Dear God, please help me to be willing to let go of any flaw or character defect I may still be clinging to. Grant me the courage and humility to face my shortcomings, and trust in your wisdom and love.

Step 6 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections: Revelation, The Abyss, Death and Rebirth

Although Step 6 has been called one of the forgotten Steps,[8] it is the culmination of all the work you have done to this point. It is "the passage of the threshold… a form of self-annihilation… But here, instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again."[9]

Imagine yourself free from the defects and flaws you have been carrying so long. Step 6 begins the process of a metaphorical death and rebirth. Your old self, flawed and broken, lies down in preparation. When you awaken, it is to a new life.

Knowledge Connections

Self-Assessment Exercises p. 141; A Healthy Mindset p. 252

Wisdom Connections

Matt[072], Dham[017], TaoT[022]

---

[5] https://alcoholicsanonymous.com/how-to-apply-alcoholics-anonymous-step-6-in-real-life/

[6] AA World Services, Inc., "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p69

[7] Based on AA World Services, Inc, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p76

[8] http://www.leademcounseling.com/wp-content/uploads/Forgotten-Steps-Presentation-Online1.pdf

[9] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p84

Step 6 Work

This exercise will help you finalize your Step 6:[10]

1. Review the list of character defects you created in Step 4.

2. Describe how each item on your list impacts your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. What is your payoff for this character defect?

3. Describe the harm this issue causes you and others.

4. Note your feelings in relation to this flaw. What are the short-term and long-term effects? Is this character defect part of a cycle of behavior?

5. Imagine life without these habits and tendencies.

Since Step 6 stresses your willingness to "Be Ready", I find it helpful to supplement that idea with what I call "Be Attitudes". These simple precepts give you something to work on while you are preparing yourself for change.

Be Attitudes:[11]

Be true to my values.
Be nice to others.
Be here now.
Be open to change and uncertainty.
Be calm.
Be content.

---

[10] Expanded from: https://alcoholicsanonymous.com/step-6-of-aa/
[11] These came to me from my Higher Power during Inner Focus.

2.7 Step 7: Humbly Ask for Change

Only a person who has passed through the gate of humility can ascend to the heights of the spirit.

--Rudolf Steiner

…why then shouldn't we be able to achieve by the same means a perfect release from every other difficulty or defect?

--Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p64

Life really sucks right now, but I know there is beauty on the other side.

--Sarah, AA Member

Step 7 Discussion

A miracle is defined as:[1]

1. An event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God.
2. One that excites admiring awe; a wonderful or amazing event, act, person, or thing. synonym: wonder.

Step 7 is where the miracle happens. A miracle is a positive event that is not only out of your control, but beyond your capabilities. It is unscientific (as we currently understand science), and it is beyond understanding. And yet there are intellectual equivalents of miracles that are readily accepted.

A eureka moment is a sudden insight that resolves a stubborn problem.[2] It is preceded by a period of intense struggle or frustration. When the problem is finally resolved, there is a moment of intense excitement and joy. A eureka moment involves an unconscious shift in perception where the elements of a problem are transformed into a solution *outside of conscious awareness.* When you have that "aha!" experience, like a lightbulb in your brain, that is a eureka moment. Step 7 is like a eureka moment for your soul.

Step 7 is a spiritual experience that may affect you in one of two ways. It could result in a sudden transformation that surprises you with its swiftness and totality. Or, changes may occur gradually, over time. Desire neither. When you ask for change, you will be provided those changes that are most appropriate for your spiritual and psychological well-being. Accept them with gratitude. Those are the changes, and the rates of change, that are best for you at the time.

---

[1] From Google, American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition

[2] Guenther Knoblich and Michael Oellinger, "Scientific American Mind, The Eureka Moment", October/November 2006

Within that framework, consider the third and fourth Simple Ideas from Part 1: Foundation:

3. New knowledge and wisdom can only come from outside our current worldview.
4. A truth exists that is both immanent and transcendent.

These truths are realized by working the Steps. As in the eureka moment, the miracle happens outside of conscious awareness. Step 7, however, does not merely represent a re-ordering of your ideas, concepts, and mental outlook. Step 7 is an opportunity for you to undergo a *fundamental personal transformation*! It opens the door to ineffable truth that is otherwise unavailable to you.

To work Step 7, you must move forward with humility. Humility is the necessary gateway through which you must pass. There are no cheats, hacks, or shortcuts for humility. Lack of humility excludes you from a successful Step 7. There are no exceptions. Think of it as an unbreakable spiritual or psychological law.

But with humility, you can ask your Higher Power to do for you that which you cannot do for yourself.[3] You must have been honest and thorough in all the Steps to this point. You must be willing. And when you ask, your Higher Power will begin removing your defects of character.[4]

How to Humbly Ask for Change

Humility is freedom from pride or arrogance.[5] It promotes openness to change. Note that humility does not mean humiliation. Having humility does not imply a lack of dignity. Quite the opposite. Humility is spiritual modesty that comes from understanding your true place in the universe.[6]

To humbly ask for change is to approach your Higher Power in supplication. Ask sincerely, without entitlement or expectation. I recall when I was told how to do Step 7: "Go home, get down on your knees, and ask God to remove your shortcomings."[7]

I was mildly surprised by the suggestion to kneel. I considered disregarding that part. After all, who would know? But I immediately realized, of course, that I would know. Humility is a subjective, internal experience (although its attributes are often externally visible). If I was serious about asking for change, I should be equally serious about being humble.

---

[3] Step 7 of AA: Ask Him to Remove Your Shortcomings - Alcoholics Anonymous. https://alcoholicsanonymous.com/step-7-of-aa/ Accessed 3/8/2023.

[4] Twelve Steps - Step Seven - (pp. 70-76) - Alcoholics Anonymous. https://www.aa.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/en_step7.pdf Accessed 3/8/2023

[5] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humility

[6] https://positivepsychology.com/humility/

[7] Thanks Kelly, I never forgot it.

2.7 Step 7: Humbly Ask for Change

Kneeling in prayer is an accepted practice in Christian[8] and non-Christian[9] faiths. It supports an attitude of meekness, submission, and awe.[10] While it can be rendered meaningless by mindless repetition,[11] kneeling for your Step 7 can be conducive to the spiritual state you need.

How to Work Step 7

> *On any given day, I can't save myself.*
>
> --Greg, AA Member

Once you are in the proper spiritual state, ask for your defects to be removed. As you do so, remember three things.

1. Your flaws and defects began as coping mechanisms to protect you. As such, they are not bad or evil. It is just as valid to pray to be healed as it is to ask for flaws or character defects to be removed.

2. You can work Step 7 once and move on to Step 8. Or, you can do your Step 7 over several days. I have done both. Do what works for you.

3. Be specific. Ask for each defect to be removed or for its positive opposite to be added to your character, like so:[12]

If you struggle with anger, pray for patience, compassion, and calm.
If you believe you are better than others, ask for pride to be removed.
If you have sexual issues, ask to be healed.
If you are greedy, pray to be more generous and grateful.
If you overeat, ask your Higher Power to remove your gluttony.
If you want what others have, ask to be content.
If you tell lies, pray for integrity and truthfulness.
If you think only of yourself, ask be less selfish.
If you feel inferior to others, pray for better self-esteem.
If you are inconsiderate, pray to be kind to others.
If you are jealous, ask to have your jealousy removed.
If you critical of others, pray to be less judgmental.
If you talk about others, pray that you will not gossip any more.
If you carry grudges, ask that you may be more forgiving.
If you try to control people, pray to have this defect removed.

Step 7 Summary

Step 7 is where spiritual transformation takes place. The changes may occur quickly or slowly, depending on what is best for you. Humility is the gateway to Step 7. Kneeling supports an attitude of meekness, submission, and awe. Be specific when you ask for each defect to be removed or transformed.

---

[8] https://www.christianity.com/wiki/prayer/what-is-the-real-purpose-of-kneeling-in-prayer.html Accessed 3/8/2023
[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kneeling; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostration
[10] https://www.christianity.com/wiki/prayer/what-is-the-real-purpose-of-kneeling-in-prayer.html
[11] I was raised in a ritualistic orthodoxy where kneeling was a mind-numbing habit.
[12] Ima Pastal (pseudonym), "AA's 12 STEPS, INCLUDING POWERFUL 4TH STEP WORKSHEETS", Step 7

2.7 Step 7: Humbly Ask for Change

Step 7 Prayer[13]

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.

Step 7 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections: Death and Rebirth, Transformation

The first recorded story of passing through the gates of transformation is the Sumerian myth of the goddess Inanna.[14] She and her sister, Ereshkigal, confronted each other as light and dark aspects of the same goddess. Joseph Campbell further states, "The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite… He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh."[15]

Knowledge Connections

Humility p. 378; Spiritual Practice p. 389

Wisdom Connections

Matt[012], Dham[034], Ench[008], TaoT[022]

Step 7 Work

1. Identify the negative patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that cause harm or prevent you from living a good life. Your Step 4 inventory is usually the source of this list. Such a review helps you gain clarity.

2. Pray or meditate to connect with your Higher Power. Express your gratitude for the guidance and support you have received so far.[16]

3. Ask your Higher Power to remove your shortcomings and help you change for the better. Be sincere, humble, and willing to let go of your ego and old ways of thinking.[17]

4. Repeat this process as long as necessary. Be patient and trust that your Higher Power is working in your best interest.

---

[13] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p76

[14] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p96

[15] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p99

[16] https://serenityatsummit.com/blog/12-steps-step-7-humbly-asking-a-higher-power-to-remove-our-shortcomings

[17] https://www.jasonwahler.com/12-steps-of-aa/step-seven-of-aa-alcoholics-anonymous

2.8 Step 8: List the Harm I Caused

Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we'll ever do.

--Brené Brown

You can learn a lot, if you open your heart, and let it soak in.

--Russell, AA Member

Step 8 Discussion

Step 8 continues the healing process. In Step 8, you create a list of any harm you caused, and prepare to make amends. To let go of the past and live in peace, you must confront the harm you caused to others and to yourself, and do your best to set it right. Like the other Steps, Step 8 is not a one-time task you do and forget, but an ongoing process.

Do not be afraid to confront your past. When you took Step 4 and Step 5, you began to face your mistakes. Now it is time to bravely acknowledge harm caused to others and yourself. You look at this damage head-on and without fear so that you can begin to make it right. It is the only way to a good life.

Step 8 is, in its most basic sense, making a list of any harm you caused. This is a frightening prospect for most. It feels like digging up something that should remain buried. But trying to forget the past does not heal you. Things do not just go away because you do not want to think about them.

The natural pull to dwell on how others harmed you breeds resentment. Inner peace requires that you explore and acknowledge your own behavior. While it is true that people have caused you pain, dwelling on those grievances is not the key. Focusing on the ways others have hurt you can divert your attention from reflecting on your own actions. Achieving inner peace requires, at least, exploring and acknowledging your own behavior.

Living well requires directing attention toward what is within your control rather than fixating on what lies beyond it. The most powerful change available to you is changing yourself. That is why you are doing Step 8, to make real change. With regard to past events, you can address only your part. You cannot control others or their past actions, nor can you change the past. But you can address those areas where you made mistakes.

While addressing your own issues, it is okay to recognize that other people have problems, too. Very few people are perfectly mature, and free of fear and insecurities. If you are working hard to recognize your own shortcomings, it is not a great leap to understand that other people are also imperfect.

Step 8 Is Working on Yourself

But always remember that you are working on your own issues. Other people must work on theirs. Having completed Step 4 through Step 7, you will have developed humility and a deflated ego. If you begin your Step 8 list and become angry or defensive again, there is no shame in revisiting those Steps. The 12 Steps are progressive, ongoing, a work in progress. It is not a contest; there is no competition and no deadline.

Do Not Look Ahead

While working on Step 8, do not look ahead to Step 9. When you start identifying those you wronged, it is a daunting experience. There are also times when you hurt others who remain unaware of the harm you caused. You will naturally resist digging all that up again. This is your fear and pride at work. Complete Step 8 as thoroughly as possible. Do not look ahead. While you are working Step 8, keep your focus on Step 8.

Accept Responsibility

You may have caused harm that did not involve a direct act against another person. Harm can be negligence or withheld care. It can be intentionally denying affection, forgetting to feed a pet, or dumping trash in a park. Harm includes not only making the world worse but also refusing to make it better. This may be a new idea to you, and that is okay.

In this context, harm is not just direct actions that cause damage, but it is also the absence of positive actions that could have made a difference. It is opportunities missed to show kindness, to offer help, or to do good. It is about the times when you could have stepped up, but chose not to. It is remaining silent when you could have made a difference, or not acting when you could have brought change. Every choice you make, or do not make, has an impact in the world. And sometimes, it is your inaction, your indifference, and your neglect that causes the most significant harm.

Harm may also be indirect. You can cause harm by having a bad temper, being dishonest, or making someone feel emotionally insecure. Stealing from a faceless corporation is still stealing, and is reflected in higher prices to consumers or lower dividends to investors. Lying on your taxes is still lying; it splits your reality into truth and untruth.

Make Your List

If you completed a thorough Step 4 and Step 5, you have already explored, in great detail, how your actions reflected your character defects. Your Step 8 list is generated by a meticulous reexamination of your Step 4, notes from Step 5, and any insights or memories since their completion. Look carefully at the work you have done so far. Make a list of any harm you caused, either by your action or inaction.

Identifying obvious harms is not difficult, and your list will likely grow as you recognize harms of varying degrees. You might think you have a disturbingly long list. Do not be worried; all will be well. Everything will be sorted out in due time. Simply make your list. Do not judge or censor yourself. Remain committed to being as honest and thorough as possible.

As you work, do your best to forgive any perceived harms done to you. Do not overstate your flaws or others. Your goal is to remain calm and objective throughout the process.

Put Yourself on the List

Do not forget to put yourself on the list of those you have harmed. Acknowledging the damage inflicted on yourself through the years, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, is necessary for personal growth. Awareness of your self-inflicted wounds paves the way for self-forgiveness. And if you cannot forgive yourself, how do you expect others to do so?

Step 8 Summary

Step 8 continues the healing process. It requires you to bravely confront the harm you caused to others and yourself, and prepare to rectify it. It is an ongoing process. Getting distracted by how others treated you makes you resentful and diverts your attention from your own actions. Acknowledging your own behavior is conducive to inner peace. While working on Step 8, do not look ahead to Step 9. Harm is more than direct actions that cause damage. It can also be the absence of positive actions that could have made a difference. Do not forget to put yourself on the list; you deserve to be able to forgive yourself.

Step 8 Prayer[1]

Heavenly Father, I ask Your help in making my list of all those I have harmed. I will take responsibility for my actions, and begin to clear my past mistakes. Grant me the willingness to begin my restitution. Amen.

Step 8 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections

The hero Hercules embarked on adventures called the Twelve Labors. He was given these tasks to atone for his past mistakes. During his travels, he paused at a village being harassed by a great sea monster.[2] Soon, the monster rose from the sea to devour its latest victim. Hercules dove into its mouth and cut his way out of its belly, slaying it. By taking the most direct approach, literally entering "the belly of the beast", the Hero faces and conquers fear. The Hero's labors, and the travels and adventures that accompany them, are necessary to atone for past wrongs committed.

---

[1] http://sober-today.org/prayers/prayer_s8.html

[2] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p84

2.8 Step 8: List the Harm I Caused

Knowledge Connections:

Values Clarification p. 166; Forgiveness p. 374; Self-Compassion p. 379

Wisdom Connections:

Matt[022], Prov[045]

Step 8 Work

1. Set aside time to reflect on past relationships and actions. Write about the harm caused, your role in it, and the impact on others. This can help you gain insight into your behavior and motivations.

2. Create a timeline of significant events in your life, noting instances where harm was caused. This written representation can help you identify patterns and understand the progression of your actions.

3. Put yourself in the shoes of those you have harmed. Write letters or journal entries from their perspective, expressing how your actions affected them emotionally, mentally, or physically. This can deepen your understanding of the impact of your behavior.

4. Identify and clarify your core values. Understanding your values can help you align your future actions with these principles, reducing the likelihood of causing harm in similar ways.

2.9 Step 9: Make Amends Where Possible

That's a spiritual lifestyle, being willing to admit that you don't know everything and that you were wrong about some things. It's about making a list of all the people you've harmed, either emotionally or physically or financially, and going back and making amends. That's a spiritual lifestyle. It's not a fluffy ethereal concept.

--Anthony Kiedis

I can't do something about that now but I might be able to do something about it later.

--Greg, AA Member

Step 9 Discussion

Take a look at what you have accomplished so far. You have completed the foundation Steps, Step 1 to Step 3. You acknowledge the unmanageability of life, and you rely on your Higher Power to help you. Your Step 4 inventory is finished. In Step 5, you confided your shortcomings. In Step 6 you became ready to change. In Step 7, you humbly asked for help to change. In Step 8, you made a list of the harm you caused. Now, in Step 9, you do your best to make things right. Step 9 is simple and straightforward, and yet it may be the most difficult and courageous thing you have ever done.

This is no small undertaking, but you are not alone. Many people have taken this Step before you. It is a journey of humility and courage, and much more than regrets and apologies. It is the opportunity to demonstrate your sincerity through action. It is a transformative process that brings healing, growth, and inner peace. Step 9 mends the broken pieces of your soul. It centers on the profound principle of forgiveness: seeking forgiveness from others, but also permission to forgive yourself.

You are now ready to address all of these issues directly. By doing so, you can stop running, hiding, avoiding, and wallowing in guilt. You can, perhaps for the first time in a long time, face life free of regrets and with the real possibility of genuine healing.

Why Make Amends

It may be obvious why you want to make amends for past wrongs. But in situations you will soon face, your willingness may waver. There are many reasons to complete Step 9, even if the immediate benefits are not obvious. While the desire to alleviate guilt and repair relationships are natural motivators, the true power of Step 9 lies in its potential to transform you from within. This leads to a deeper understanding of yourself. Ultimately, completing Step 9 resolves your past while setting you free from regret to embrace a better future.

Here are a few more reasons to thoroughly work Step 9:

Behavior Changes: Step 9 represents a fundamental change in your behavior. Beyond simply apologizing, it requires you to correct your mistakes. It demonstrates that you are willing to change for the better.

Better Relationships: Step 9 is an exercise in forgiveness, not only from others, and *of* others, but also of yourself. It brings healing to both parties by resolving past conflicts.[1]

Spirituality: Righting wrongs from your past brings peace to your soul. You will learn humility, compassion, and gratitude through completing Step 9.

Ethics: It is the right thing to do. Step 9 means acknowledging your mistakes and working to fix them. It is not only a personal choice but a moral choice, as well. By taking responsibility for your actions, you grow morally and spiritually. By doing the right thing, you become a more ethical person.

Self-Esteem: Making amends can provide an immense sense of relief and newfound hope for the future.[2] It can reduce stress by correcting previous mistakes.

Self-Compassion: You deserve the same kindness and forgiveness that you offer to others. Through Step 9, you lay the foundation for a more positive relationship with yourself.

It makes the world better: Step 9 moves toward creating a more compassionate and harmonious world. When you make amends to someone, you inspire and motivate them to be better as well. This ripple effect spreads outward from every amends you make.

Call it karma: Although there is a formal religious understanding of karma, in casual conversation it simply implies balance in the universe.[3] Although this may or may not be true, I believe there is an account that tallies your rights and wrongs. It may be spiritual, but it is definitely psychological, too. At some level you know when you have done wrong, and you know, just as well, when you try to do the right thing. If that is karma, you want to keep your accounts balanced.

When Not to Make Amends

While Step 9 is a single simple statement, "Make amends where possible," it implies a rather large caveat. Although many people will be open to accepting amends, avoid approaching anyone if your attempt to do so would risk causing them further harm.

Do not take this exception lightly. Since your entire purpose in Step 9 is to fix your mistakes, causing further damage would only compound the problem. For example:

---

[1] https://www.verywellmind.com/a-study-of-step-9-69407
[2] https://fherehab.com/learning/making-amends-how-to-approach-step-nine-and-when-not-to/
[3] https://www.webmd.com/balance/what-is-karma

Reopening old wounds: If reaching out to someone would reopen old emotional wounds or trauma, it might be more harmful than beneficial.

Timing issues: Making amends at an inappropriate time, such as during a major life event or crisis for the other person, could cause more stress.

Potential for rejection: If there is a strong likelihood that the person will not be receptive or might react negatively, consider that before proceeding.

Respect boundaries: Consider the other person's emotional state and their desire for contact. If they have expressed a clear wish to move on and avoid further interaction, do not violate their privacy. Forcing unwanted contact under the guise of amends is insensitive and cruel.

Disrupting the healing process: If the person has moved on and achieved a level of closure, reopening the past could do more damage than good.

Collateral damage: Sometimes a person may not know what you did, or by making amends you may actually harm a third person. Marital affairs are a good example of this. If your (or the other person's) partner never suspected infidelity, admitting it to them could cause a lifetime of pain and insecurity. Consider carefully any possible ripple effect when making your amends.

Complex Relationships: In chaotic, unhealthy relationships, you must consider the potential for manipulation. Some individuals may use the act of amends to control or exploit you. In these cases, find alternative amends.

Legal Issues: When making amends, be mindful of potential legal implications. Taking responsibility may stir up legal issues, especially regarding financial, contractual, or criminal matters. If uncertain, consult an attorney for guidance on making reparations in a legal and morally sound way. This approach respects both your responsibilities and legal standing.

The Gray Area

Ultimately, Step 9 concerns them, not you: the people, entities, or institutions you harmed. It addresses the damage you caused to the world. Making amends makes you feel better, but you are not doing it for a pat on the back, a medal, or to look good. You are making amends because you caused harm, and now you are trying to fix it.

You will have situations on your amends list where you are confused or conflicted about how to, or even if you should, proceed. Aside from serious legal issues, emotional trauma, or physical danger, concern for yourself is secondary to setting things right. You will be stressed when making your amends. You may fear humiliation, or the righteous anger of someone you harmed, or making financial restitution.

It is tempting, and I have done this myself, to put a little extra emphasis on the part about not causing further harm. Be very careful in doing so. You can easily rationalize yourself into avoiding what needs to be done. In any gray area, make the proper decision without regard (other than those just mentioned) to yourself, and put the other person first. Praying for guidance is helpful, as is the advice of a trusted mentor or professional advisor.

How to Make Amends

Your amends will be different for every situation. There is no single formula or process to rely on. But no one knows your life or your situation better than you do. Make use of the knowledge and wisdom you have gained so far in working the Steps. Ask advice from people you trust, and pray for guidance and willingness to proceed.

Pray for Willingness: Start by centering yourself and praying for the willingness to make sincere amends. A quiet moment allows you to adopt the right mindset, acknowledging any fears or hesitations while finding the strength to move forward in the amends process.

Individuals: Begin by reaching out directly to individuals you have harmed. You must first confirm that they are willing to see you. If they agree to see you, let them choose the time, place, and conditions of your meeting. Approach them in person, with humility, acknowledging your mistakes, and expressing a genuine desire to make amends. Listen to their feelings and responses, and show your commitment to understand the impact of your actions. Be prepared to offer restitution or support in a way that is meaningful to them.

Institutions, Businesses, Organizations: Extend your amends to include institutions, businesses, or organizations that may have been affected by your actions. This could involve addressing any financial or professional repercussions resulting from your behavior. Open a channel of communication, demonstrating your commitment to rectifying the harm caused and making a positive contribution to setting it right.

Animals and Pets: Consider the well-being of animals and pets that may have been impacted. You could join animal welfare organizations, volunteer at shelters, and adopt responsible pet ownership practices. Making amends in this context demonstrates your recognition of the broader impact of your actions on the lives of innocent beings.

Other Harms: Identify and address any other specific harms you may have caused. This could be environmental impact, property damage, or indirect consequences of your actions. Taking proactive steps to repair or reduce these harms shows your commitment to making things right on all levels.

Yourself: Do not forget to include yourself in the amends process. This includes self-compassion and forgiveness. Reflect on the lessons learned from your mistakes and actively work toward getting better. Engage in positive self-care practices and make choices aligned with your values.

Things to Remember

Recognize the limits of amends: Some actions have irreversible consequences, and attempting to fix them is unrealistic. Instead, acknowledge the harm caused, take responsibility, and show genuine remorse. This is a powerful step toward healing, even when complete restoration is not possible.

Prioritize your mental health: Engaging in amends should be a positive step forward, not a source of distress. If making amends overwhelms you or triggers anxiety and depression, prioritize your own well-being. Seek professional help to manage your emotions and work Step 9 in a healthy way.

Do not be a do-gooder or start a crusade: You may feel a sense of euphoria as you proceed through Step 9. Acknowledge this feeling, but do not be swept into the idea that you are saving the world. You are, after all, attempting to fix mistakes that *you made*, and mitigating harm that *you caused.* Allow yourself to feel better for doing the right thing, but continue to work carefully, with thoughtful compassion.

Alternative Amends

There are some situations where making amends is not possible. If, for example, an attempt to make amends would cause more harm, or your amends is to a person with whom you have lost contact, or a stranger. The harm caused may have been something vague that you cannot pigeonhole into an easy category. Regardless, making the amends is important, even if no one else knows. Because you will know!

In these situations, I recommend alternative forms of amends. Alternative amends are not a first choice, but a last resort. They must be proportional to the damage you caused. Only you will know when and what that entails, but here are a few examples to consider:

Indirect apologies: When direct apologies are not possible, express regret through actions like improved behavior, active listening, and empathy. Actions can often convey sincerity better than words.

Handwritten letters of remorse: Write handwritten notes expressing regret, acknowledging your wrongdoing, and outlining steps to make amends. The personal touch adds authenticity. Only in rare cases should electronic communication be used.

Unsent letters of apology: Write unsent letters when direct communication might cause harm. This develops your personal growth and self-awareness.

Acts of service: Repair relationships and communities through actions like participating in local projects that demonstrate your commitment to change.

Donations to charities: Contribute to causes related to your actions, but avoid relying solely on donations to make amends. Ensure your efforts reflect genuine commitment. Do not try to "buy your way out" of Step 9.

Unspoken acts of kindness: Practice small, thoughtful gestures that create understanding and compassion without needing recognition.

Living amends: Show commitment to positive change through consistent, intentional actions that reflect lessons learned from past mistakes.

Volunteer work: Engage in volunteer activities that benefit your community, such as helping at shelters, hospitals, or food pantries.

Another type of volunteer work is simply doing something that you see needs to be done. Mow your elderly neighbor's lawn, pick up trash on your street,[4] clean up a park.

When doing volunteer work, do not call attention to your actions. Do not seek or expect a reward. Simply do what needs to be done to make the world better.

The Right Time

Step 9 is not a quick fix but a gradual process that requires patience. You may need to wait to make some of your amends. It is not practical to expect to make all your amends quickly. The other person may not be ready, the situation may be delicate, or they may need time to heal. Forcing the issue can make things worse. Instead, sincere intentions will help you make those amends when the time comes.

The weird thing about amends, if you genuinely want to set things right, is that sometimes you will meet that person by chance. This is called serendipity and it has happened to me. Serendipity often plays a role in successful amends through unexpected encounters or chance conversations. By remaining open to possibilities and trusting your Higher Power, you position yourself for the right moment.

This does not imply passively waiting. Be patient, but be ready. Some of your amends may not take place for months or years, not by your choice, but because the time is not right.

Your intention to fix your mistakes, even if not immediately acted upon, shapes your character for the future. Be patient, trust the process, and stay open to life's opportunities. As you work on yourself, the right time for amends will come, a healing experience for everyone involved.

It is not necessary to complete all your amends before you go to Step 10. It is only necessary that you make a good start on Step 9 and have sincere intentions to complete it. Once you have completed several amends on your list, continue Step 9 concurrently with the rest of the Steps. Making amends may be a lifelong process, and you do not want to delay further progress as you finish Step 9.

The Promises[5]

The program of Alcoholics Anonymous offers a picture of life after a person has progressed this far in the 12 Steps. These 12 Promises are relevant to anyone who sincerely seeks a better life by working the Steps.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.

---

[4] This example from Larry, AA Member, whose sponsor had him anonymously picking up trash in his neighborhood at dawn

[5] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p83-84

We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

Ultimately, Step 9 demands not just courage, but unwavering integrity and empathy. You must strike a balance between acknowledging your actions of the past, and safeguarding everyone involved. The path to healing is winding and narrow. Tread carefully, and proceed only when you are sure the next step is the right one. When you approach each situation with empathy, wisdom, and a genuine desire to do right, you will be rewarded by personal growth and inner peace.

Step 9 Summary

In Step 9, you make amends for past wrongs. You go beyond apologies and demonstrate change through action. This brings healing, growth, and a more ethical life. Do not cause further harm. Recognize legal implications and other complexities of making amends.

Benefits include behavioral changes, improved relationships, spiritual growth, and higher self-esteem. Step 9 is an opportunity for personal growth and making the world better. Face the challenges, prioritize mental health, and consider alternative amends when necessary.

Step 9 Prayer[6]

I pray for the right attitude as I work on Step 9, being ever mindful not to cause harm to others in the process. I seek Your guidance in approaching each situation with honesty and sincerity. I will do my best to live well, help others, and make the world better.

Step 9 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections: In the Hero's Journey, atonement (at-one-ment) is attained by facing one's fears directly, and taking responsibility as though without fear: "The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands—and the two are atoned."[7]

Knowledge Connections:

Truths About Doing p. 193; Emotion p. 345; Relationships p. 425

Wisdom Connections:

Ench[013], Ench[053], Matt[015] 5:23-24, Dham[009] 66-69

---

[6] Adapted from: https://www.aacle.org/twelve-step-prayers/

[7] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p135

Step 9 Work

1. Use your Step 8 list of the individuals, groups, or institutions you have harmed. This list serves as the foundation for your amends. Include specific details about the harm caused and the relationships involved.

2. Decide which amends are direct (face-to-face), indirect, or alternative. Evaluate each amends on your list and determine the most appropriate approach for reconciliation. Some situations may warrant face-to-face conversations (direct amends), while others may be better suited for indirect methods, such as letters or symbolic gestures. Consider alternative amends when direct or indirect methods might not be feasible or appropriate.

3. Prepare in advance for face-to-face amends. Write out, in detail, what you intend to say to each person, addressing the specific harm caused and expressing genuine remorse. Be sincere. This preparation helps you to be thoughtful, honest, and focused on taking responsibility for your actions.

4. Complete alternative amends where necessary:

Indirect apologies

Handwritten letters of remorse

Unsent letters of apology

Acts of service

Donations to charities

Unspoken acts of kindness

Living amends

Volunteer work

Unofficial, local volunteer work

Alternative amends are the last resort and proportional to the damage caused. Do not use alternative amends as an easy way out of Step 9.

2.10 Step 10: Continue My Inventory

How noble and good everyone could be if, every evening before falling asleep, they were to recall to their minds the events of the whole day and consider exactly what has been good and bad.

--Anne Frank

Step 10 Discussion

Step 10 is a daily inventory, and the first of the three maintenance Steps. Continuing your inventory involves an ongoing process of self-assessment and introspection. In doing so, you make yourself a better person. Daily inventories help you live a better life.

Daily reflection allows you to pause, evaluate your actions, thoughts, and emotions, and identify areas for improvement. By taking the time to reflect each day, you can gain insights into your behavior, motivations, and choices that align with your values and goals. A regular personal inventory increases self-awareness and accountability. By honestly assessing your strengths and weaknesses and actively working toward self-improvement, you form good habits and become your best self.

The Step 10 questions are the framework for reflection and self-assessment. Try to incorporate this practice into your daily routine. While you can simply think carefully and reflect on your answers, writing or recording your answers into a journal may be more effective. The Step 10 questions are:[1]

1. Have I been fearful, obsessive, resentful, selfish, angry, dishonest, or secretive? By honestly examining your thoughts, actions, and emotions in relation to these traits, you can gain insights into patterns of behavior that may be hindering your well-being and relationships. Acknowledging and addressing these negative tendencies allows you to build healthier habits, improve your communication and relationships, and leads to a better life.

2. Did I cause any harm? Another aspect of Step 10 involves reflecting on the harm you may have caused to others. This self-reflection helps you recognize the consequences of your actions and take responsibility for your behavior. By acknowledging the harm caused, you can make amends and work toward healing relationships and rebuilding trust.

3. Do I owe any amends? Step 10 asks you to consider whether you owe any amends. This reflection involves identifying instances where you have wronged others and taking action to make things right. Making amends requires courage, humility, and a genuine desire for personal growth. By taking responsibility for your past actions and making amends, you can experience healing and restore harmony in your life.

---

[1] These questions include those from various AA worksheets, my own experiences, and the last question is from Tim, AA Member

4. What did I do well? Step 10 also encourages you to acknowledge your positive actions and achievements. By reflecting on what you have done well, you reinforce your self-esteem and motivation to continue on your path. Recognizing your personal growth and accomplishments provides a sense of progress and reinforces your belief in your ability to overcome challenges.

5. What could I have done better? In addition to celebrating your successes, Step 10 prompts you to reflect on areas where you could have done better. This encourages personal growth and learning from past mistakes. By identifying areas for improvement, you can set goals and develop strategies for continued improvement.

6. What is good about today? Look for something positive about each day. Practicing gratitude helps shift your focus toward living a good life, improving your mindset. Focusing on daily blessings and joy brings a sense of contentment and appreciation that enhances your overall well-being.

Introduction to RaDaR

Chaos demands to be recognized and experienced before letting itself be converted into a new order. -- Hermann Hesse

Clarity in chaos benefits from a tool that is structured and flexible. I call it RaDaR. It is a simple, powerful framework that brings awareness and purpose to thoughts, emotions, and actions. It applies in real time and also works within a Step 10 daily inventory. RaDaR is my personal implementation of a thought-stopping technique.[2]

RaDaR is an acronym that stands for:

Reflect: Pause to assess your current state or situation. This step involves noticing and carefully examining your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors without judgment. Bring to mind everything you thought, said, and did with regard to the situation.

Describe: Clearly articulate the results of your reflection. Writing it down is even better. Use neutral, specific language to label emotions, identify thought patterns, or pinpoint problems. Do not berate yourself. Do not blame others or circumstances. Simply gather the facts.

Respond: Take thoughtful action based on what you have discovered and described. This could mean reframing your mindset, addressing an issue more directly, or breaking a task down into manageable steps. Aim for a response that aligns with your Higher Power. Sometimes the best response is to pause, or to reevaluate the situation. But the point is that whatever you do, make sure it aligns with your values.

RaDaR is useful across many domains of daily life. It gives you a deliberate, repeatable pause to step back. By shifting your focus from immediate emotional reaction to clear-headed awareness, it turns potential chaos into a steady opportunity for personal growth.

---

2 Further discussed in Knowledge-Mind, and Emotion.

Tying RaDaR to Step 10

Step 10 is Continue My Inventory. This daily self-assessment aligns beautifully with the principles of RaDaR, offering you a structured way to practice self-reflection and growth. You can use RaDaR in addition to, or instead of, the Step 10 questions listed.

Reflect: At the end of your day, pause to review your actions, thoughts, and feelings. What went well? Where could I have done better? Did my behavior align with my values?

Describe: Be honest and specific about what you observe. Did I let impatience guide me? Did I show kindness where it was needed? Did I take responsibility for my mistakes?

Respond: Commit to purposeful change. How can I fix my mistakes or make amends? What steps can I take in keeping with my goals and values? Am I acting in alignment with my Higher Power?

RaDaR as a Permanent Tool

RaDaR is discussed and used throughout this book. It is both a guide and a compass. Not just a one-time tool, it is a way to approach problems and opportunities as they arise, helping you build a life rooted in mindfulness, intentionality, and purpose. (See pages 116, 218, 260, 306, 384, 447, 788)

Throughout the chapters ahead, you will see RaDaR applied to various aspects of life. Each time you use it, you will strengthen your ability to reflect on where you are, describe what is happening, and respond in a way that moves you forward. Let RaDaR be an ongoing thread that ties the moments of your life together into a meaningful whole.

Step 10 Summary

Step 10, as a daily inventory, is a process of continuous self-assessment and introspection for personal growth and fulfillment. The questions you answer during this inventory are a framework for self-examination, prompting you to look closely at your life and make meaningful changes where necessary. Honestly admitting negative behavior and taking responsibility for harm caused, you work toward healing relationships, restoring harmony, and increasing well-being.

Step 10 Prayer[3]

Lord, grant me the strength and wisdom to grow in understanding and honesty. Help me to vigilantly watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear within myself. Grant me the humility to make amends where I caused harm. Guide me in living according to your will, removing arrogance and fear from my heart. Amen.

---

[3] Based on https://www.friendsofbillw.net/prayers-principles/aa-12-step-prayers

2.10 Step 10: Continue My Inventory

Step 10 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections: Searching within yourself through a daily inventory is a truly heroic act. It deflates the ego, and thereby recreates the world as your temple and reminds you of your place in it. "...the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation... [where] the hero goes inward, to be born again... and the heavenly land beyond, above, and below the confines of the world, are one and the same."[4]

Knowledge Connections:

Creating a Daily Routine p. 244; RaDaR p. 306

Wisdom Connections:

Dham[008], Prov[014], TaoT[010]

Step 10 Work

1. Daily Journaling: Set aside time each day to write about your thoughts, emotions, and actions. Reflect on whether you have been selfish, dishonest, resentful, or fearful. Note where you caused harm or could have done better.

2. Mindfulness Practice: Use RaDaR or mindfulness meditation to increase self-awareness and observe your thoughts and emotions without judgment. Pay attention to recurring patterns or negative tendencies that may be influencing your behavior.

3. Trusted Discussions: Share your experiences and reflections with a trusted friend, mentor, or sponsor. Discuss any struggles or challenges you have faced and seek their perspective and support in addressing them.

4. End-of-Day Review: Before bed, take a few minutes to reflect on your day, considering your interactions, decisions, and behaviors. Identify whether you acted in alignment with your values and goals, and note any areas for improvement or instances where amends may be needed.

5. Forgiveness: Work on forgiving yourself and others by letting go of resentments and grudges. Acknowledge your mistakes and shortcomings, and use them as opportunities for learning and growth.

Self-scrutiny is often the most unpleasant, and always the most difficult, of moral actions. But it is also the most important and salutary; for, as the wisest of the Greeks said, "An unexamined life is not worth living."

--J. Strachan.

---

[4] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p84

2.11 Step 11: Pray and Meditate for Guidance

Then [said Philosophy]: 'Exceedingly do I rejoice, dear pupil; thine eye is now fixed on the very central mark of truth. Moreover, herein is revealed that of which thou didst erstwhile profess thyself ignorant.'

'What is that?' said I.

'The end and aim of the whole universe. Surely it is that which is desired of all; and, since we have concluded the good to be such, we ought to acknowledge the end and aim of the whole universe to be 'the good.'

- Boethius, Translated by H.R. James

Step 11 Discussion[1]

Step 11 is prayer and meditation for guidance to live in accordance with your values. It is seeking conscious contact with your Higher Power on a daily basis so that you can make the right decisions, live well, and make the world better. Once you have made this a daily habit, you will recognize the incredible value it brings to your life.

Just as your body needs air, food, and water, your mind and spirit require a healthy and regular practice of prayer and meditation. With it, you see beyond the mundane details of earthly life into the "ultimate reality which is God's kingdom."[2] When you have received the slightest glimpse of that sacred celestial existence, you yearn to continue within it. And, as you will discover, you may do so by humbly and continuously attempting to find, and align yourself with, the will of your Higher Power. That is all you have to do.

And you ask, "How does one go about this?" Remember, first, that "how" is an acronym for, "honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness". Without those three qualities as a stable foundation, you have little chance of a proper beginning. But with them, prayer and meditation become more practical.

Prayer and meditation are the practice of engaging your mind and heart in sincere conversation with your Higher Power. You lay the groundwork by settling into a quiet frame of mind and focusing on opening a channel of discourse within yourself. There are many ways to do this. A good way to begin is by reading the Step 11 prayer.

Read the prayer at the end of the chapter several times, slowly, concentrating on each word. Do not resist its meaning, but let it drift quietly into you. Relax and breathe deeply as the meaning of each line permeates your mind and heart. Let yourself be carried away by the selfless intentions expressed in every line of this beautiful prayer.

---

[1] Modeled on AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", Step 11

[2] AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p98

While the sentiments of such a prayer seem to represent an impossibly high standard, Step 11, like all the Steps, is a life-long process. By striving for the highest ideals of human conduct, you accept the challenge of continuous improvement every time you work this Step. In doing so, you tread the same golden path of many who came before. You strive for "spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."[3]

When I realized the true price of spiritual progress, I admit I was somewhat dismayed. I rather liked the idea of the lone hermit meditating in a cave, like Amos Wilson, the Pennsylvania Hermit.[4] And while this may be a valid spiritual path for some, it is not practical for most. Spirituality is not refined by prayer and meditation alone, but by praying and meditating for guidance on how to *be a better person*, and how to *make the world a better place*!

After all, what else is there that matters? To make progress, I had to face reality and give up a cherished personal myth: the idea that I can do it myself; that spiritual development is an isolated, internal change independent of everything going on around me. I realized that I cannot advance spiritually in a vacuum. I have to grow personally, to accept, interact, be kind to, and yes, love, others and myself.

Paradoxically, however, it is still an individual endeavor. While you have tools to get you started, the specifics of prayer and meditation must be worked out for yourself, with your Higher Power. Keep in mind:

Prayer and meditation are conversing, communing, and aligning your will with your Higher Power. In Knowledge-Spirit, I call it, "Inner Focus". There is no right or wrong way to do it. The important things are pure intent, sincere desire, and persistent effort.

Make prayer and meditation a building block of your daily routine. In the morning, as soon as you open your eyes, ask your Higher Power for help with the coming day. Have a daily quiet time, during which you allow yourself time for prayer and meditation. Pray and meditate, when you can, throughout your day. And, in the evening, incorporate prayer and meditation into your Step 10 inventory.

While you should rarely ask for specific things or outcomes, such rigorous discipline is sometimes easier said than done. On those occasions when you pray for such things, add the intention of, "…if it is your will," or, "…if it is the right thing," or something similar.

When faced with a decision, pause and ask for guidance. Carefully filter out selfish, ego-driven desires, and seek those answers which are best for all involved, (including yourself). Again, add the intention, "…not my will, but yours be done."

Double-check the guidance you receive in prayer and meditation with trusted friends or mentors. Our egos play tricks on us, and what you think is guidance from your Higher Power can be wishful thinking.

---

3 AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p60

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_%22Amos%22_Wilson; I quote him several times in Wisdom-Leaves of Life

In stressful situations, remind yourself that "it is better to comfort than to be comforted, to understand than to be understood, to love than to be loved…". But this is not a requirement for self-immolation on the altar of altruism. Remember, you are part of the world, too. You deserve to have your needs met as long as it is not at another's expense.[5]

There will be times when you do not want to pray and meditate. You will, in fact, resist it completely. When this happens, and it likely will, sooner or later, be kind to yourself. Do not overthink it. Simply resume when you are ready.

There are many benefits to prayer and meditation. You find a new sense of belonging with others, and within yourself. The world seems less hostile and cold. You acquire a new certainty of purpose. You come to understand that there are eternal truths. The petty difficulties of daily life lose their power to disturb you. You take comfort in communing with your Higher Power. You know that you are loved, and all is well.

Be Realistic in Your Spirituality

I recently shared this at a 12 Step meeting:

I used to think that after working on my spirituality for a long time, as I have, I would be more "spiritual", (striking a meditation pose and closing my eyes). But it isn't like that. I'm not sure it's like that for anyone.

Spirituality, like most things, comes with mixed social messages. Also like most things, you have to figure it out for yourself. It is easy to think you are spiritual because those around you think you are. It is easy to think you are spiritual if you feel morally superior to other people, or even to the person you used to be.

There is no endpoint to spirituality; you will never arrive at, or achieve spirituality. It is a process. You will still be human; you will become angry and sad. You will still spill soup in your lap, and sometimes you will do or say stupid things. You will not become less human. In many ways, you will become more human. You may become less flawed, but you will also be more accepting of the flaws you have. That means you are on the right path.

Do not confuse your ego with spirituality. On this physical plane, the goal is for them to coexist peacefully. Set aside all your preconceptions of what spirituality means, and work diligently and consistently on building communication with your Higher Power. That is spirituality,

You may adopt and discard many different prayers, styles of meditation, and external rituals in your spiritual journey. Think of these, not as mistakes, but as part of the growing process. Your understanding of your Higher Power may (and probably will) also change over time. All of that is as it should be. Just as you learn new things about people close to you, so will you learn new things about your Higher Power and yourself.

---

5 Because selflessness is not self-destruction.

During prayer and meditation, you may occasionally have blinding flashes of insight and spiritual connection. More often, however, your results will be more subtle. Your relationships will improve. You will make better decisions. You will stay calm in situations that would have otherwise made you crazy.

Step 11 is an open-ended, lifelong journey of exploration and discovery. But remember that it completely depends on thoroughly working all the Steps that come before it.

Step 11 Summary

Step 11 emphasizes the importance of prayer and meditation for seeking guidance aligned with your values and "the good". By establishing daily contact with your Higher Power, you gain clarity in decision-making and contribute positively to the world. Through regular prayer and meditation, you deepen your connection to divine wisdom and purpose. While it is a personal practice, characterized by honesty, openness, and willingness, it also requires engaging with others and striving for spiritual progress over spiritual perfection. Prayer and meditation become daily rituals, offering solace, guidance, and a sense of belonging. Be realistic in your spirituality.

Step 11 Prayer[6]

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,
that where there is hatred, I may bring love,
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony,
that where there is error, I may bring truth,
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith,
that where there is despair, I may bring hope,
that where there are shadows, I may bring light,
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek rather
to comfort than to be comforted,
to understand, than to be understood,
to love, than to be loved.
For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life.
Amen.

---

[6] Generally known as The Prayer of St. Francis, with slight variations of translation: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_of_Saint_Francis, from AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", Step 11

Step 11 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections:

Prayer and meditation help you to maintain equilibrium and become a better person. You find a place within you that is a point of perfect peace, and from which you cannot be moved. From the legend of the Buddha: "One day, he sat beneath a tree, and the tree was illuminated with his radiance. He arose, and as he walked along a road adorned by gods, nature paid homage with flowers and perfumes. Heavenly music filled the air as he journeyed to the Tree of Enlightenment. With determination, he settled beneath the Bo Tree, on the Immovable Spot. Mara (distraction from enlightenment), mounted on an elephant and with weapons in his thousand hands, appeared with his army, seeking to disrupt his meditation. Despite Mara's attacks, the Savior transformed weapons into flowers and ointments. The god challenged his right to be sitting on the Immovable Spot, and Future Buddha touched the ground, calling upon the Earth to bear witness to his right to sit at the Immovable Spot. With thunderous roars, the Earth affirmed his position."[7]

Knowledge Connections:

Spirit p. 385

Wisdom Connections:

Ench[022], Ench[023], Matt[012]-Matt[024], Dham[053], Prov[005]-Prov[007]

Step 11 Work

1. Begin your day with a moment of quiet reflection, expressing gratitude and setting positive intentions for the day ahead. Take a few minutes to pray or meditate, asking for guidance in your actions and decisions throughout the day.

2. Set aside a specific time each day for meditation. Find a quiet and comfortable space where you can sit quietly and focus on your breath or a chosen thought or wisdom passage. Let go of distractions and connect with your inner self, seeking clarity and insight.

3. Take a few moments several times a day to focus on your breath, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. This simple practice can help calm your mind, reduce stress, and increase your awareness of the present moment.

4. Keep a prayer or meditation journal to record your thoughts, reflections, and insights during your spiritual practices. Write down any guidance or inspiration you receive, as well as any questions or concerns you may have. Reviewing your journal regularly can help you track your progress and deepen your spiritual connection.

---

[7] Paraphrased from, Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p30

5. Take your meditation practice outdoors with a walking meditation. Find a peaceful outdoor space where you can walk slowly and mindfully, paying attention to each step and the sensations in your body. Use this time to connect with nature, quiet your mind, and open yourself to guidance from your Higher Power.

6. Create a sense of gratitude through prayer or meditation by focusing on the things you are thankful for. Spend a few moments reflecting on your blessings, opportunities, and positive experiences. Express your gratitude to your Higher Power, acknowledging the abundance in your life and asking for continued guidance.

7. Practice sending love and compassion to yourself and others through loving-kindness meditation. Sit quietly and repeat phrases such as "May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be safe, may I live with ease" while visualizing yourself surrounded by love and light. Then extend these wishes to loved ones, acquaintances, and even those you may have difficulty with, fostering a sense of connection and goodwill.

8. Read spiritual texts or inspirational literature that aligns with your beliefs and values. Choose passages that resonate with you and spend time reflecting on their meaning and relevance to your life. Allow the wisdom and insights from these texts to guide your prayers and meditations, deepening your spiritual understanding and connection.

2.12 Step 12: Make the World Better

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life from aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

--Emily Dickinson.

Step 12 Discussion

In Step 12, you complete your transformative journey. This Step marks the culmination of your self-reflection and healing, moving from inward focus and growth to outward contribution.

Begin with your immediate surroundings and relationships. Start with small acts of kindness and understanding, such as listening to a friend in need, or offering a helping hand to a neighbor. In your daily interactions, you create a ripple effect of goodwill that spreads outward.

Take responsibility for your actions and make amends where needed. This may include apologizing for past mistakes, forgiving others, and continuously trying to be a better person. Practice humility and empathy to create harmony in all your relationships.

Recognize the power of your actions to create positive change in the world around you. Be aware of how you affect people in your relationships. Be compassionate and proactive in your daily choices. Through these personal efforts, you can make a meaningful difference in the world and leave a positive impact on everyone with whom you come into contact.

You alone cannot fix the world's problems. Nor should you try to bear that burden. But you can begin in your own small corner of the world and make it better. Be friendly, listen to people when they speak, respect others, smile, share a kind word. Do volunteer work, pick up trash on your street, say something nice to a stranger. Do not expect rewards or praise; do good for the sake of doing good.

Acts of kindness and goodwill improve the world, but are significant beyond their immediate impact. There is a spiritual component to your actions. Like a tiny pebble thrown into a pond, a small act of kindness ripples outward in every direction. By building a habit of benevolence and compassion, you align yourself with your Higher Power and universal harmony.

2.12 Step 12: Make the World Better

Each act of kindness not only uplifts the receiver, but elevates your own consciousness. Keep your intentions pure, and your deeds resonate on a spiritual level, enhancing the lives of everyone they touch. By choosing to do good, you transform the world and yourself.

Start Making the World Better

You may look around and be overwhelmed by problems in the world. You might say to yourself, "How can I make this better? How can one person fix all of these problems?" That sense of helplessness is not in the spirit of Step 12. Working Step 12 means you find things that you can make better, and doing them. It is the opposite of helplessness. It is going against the grain, swimming upstream, not accepting the status quo.

Start by looking at your immediate surroundings, your home, neighborhood, and workplace. The small things you complain about are the easiest place to start. Pick up trash in your neighborhood, clean the microwave in the breakroom at work, say a kind word to your partner at home. These are easy, small things you can do right away. With small actions, you build momentum.

Extend your focus outward. Help a struggling coworker. Listen to your partner's concerns. Plan a play date for your kids. Spend 10 minutes caring for and paying attention to your pets.

Use the skills and time you have to help someone else. It does not have to be an official act; do not seek recognition for what you do. Teach someone a skill. Volunteer at a homeless shelter, hospital, or nursing home. Spend time at an animal-rescue shelter.

You can make donations to causes you believe in, but giving money is a symbolic act. I am not saying it does not make the world better. It probably does, depending on the cause. But you must also look carefully at your payoff. Making a donation out of disposable income you will not miss is not a sacrifice. Contributing to causes that give you free swag and souvenirs to show off is simply feeding your ego.

Step 12 is making the world better from a personal point of view. It is doing whatever you can do to improve the life of others without asking for reward or recognition. It may be acts of service, financial donations, or just a smile and kind word to a stranger. Step 12 is the culmination of all the work you have done so far. Look around you. Start now. Make the world better.

I will not kill or hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life and guard and perfect all natural beauty on earth. I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into all the higher powers of duty and happiness, not in rivalship or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honor of others and for the joy and peace of my own life. --John Ruskin

2.12 Step 12: Make the World Better

Step 12 Summary

In Step 12 of your transformative journey, you shift from self-reflection to outward contribution. Begin with small acts of kindness in your immediate surroundings. Take responsibility, practice humility and empathy. Recognize the power of your actions to effect positive change. Start in your own corner of the world by being friendly, volunteering, and doing good without expectation of reward. Acts of kindness have a spiritual significance, shaping your present and future experiences and elevating your consciousness. By consciously choosing to make the world better, you not only impact others but also transform yourself. That is the essence of Step 12.

Step 12 Prayer

God, guide me through the Steps from self-reflection and growth to contributing to a better world. Help me spread kindness and understanding to everyone I meet. May my actions reflect your divine love and compassion, transforming myself and others. Amen.

Step 12 Connections

The Hero's Journey Connections:

After completing your Hero's Journey through the 12 Steps, you have a responsibility to make the best use of what you have learned, "When the hero-quest has been accomplished… the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the [knowledge and wisdom he has gained] back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds."[1]

Knowledge Connections:

Spirit p. 385; Relationships p. 425; Practice and Projects p. 455

Wisdom Connections:

Matt[022]-Matt[023], Dahm[016]-Dahm[020], Prov[010]

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

--[Attributed to] Ralph Waldo Emerson

---

[1] Joseph Campbell, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", p179

2.12 Step 12: Make the World Better

Step 12 Work

Making the world better, in the sense of Step 12, is not theoretical. It does not require a lot of planning or discussion. You do not need committees and meetings and white papers. It is, instead, hands-on, and face-to-face, and real-life. Do not do something, like contribute money to a cause, that makes you feel better and assuages your conscience. Do not expect recognition, nor ask for a reward. Do something real, that has cost for you in time, effort, or emotion, that has meaning and impact on a personal basis.

Here are a few examples:

Listen to others without interrupting.
Ask someone how they are, and follow up on their answer.
Learn one small fact about every person you meet.
Offer assistance without expecting anything in return.
Smile and spread positivity wherever you go.
Offer to help a neighbor with tasks or chores.
Share your knowledge and skills.
Compliment someone genuinely and uplift their day.
Practice forgiveness and let go of grudges.
Express sympathy for other people's struggles.
Help clean someone's house.
Send notes or letters to show appreciation.
Do at least one kind act every day.
Volunteer locally.
Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
Review and work on your relationships.
Help someone if they are behind at work.
Say "thank you" and mean it.
Open doors for the elderly.
Donate blood.
Clean up litter in your neighborhood or local park.
Mentor a young person.
Cook a meal for someone going through a tough time.
Practice patience and understanding.
Share inspirational quotes or messages to uplift others.
Offer to teach someone a new skill or hobby.
Send a care package to someone in need.
Share positive news stories or acts of kindness to inspire others.
Be inclusive and accepting in your personal and professional circles.
Strike up a conversation with a stranger.
Walk a neighbor's dog to give them a break.
Join a local hobby or interest group to share experiences.
Visit a nursing home or assisted living facility.
Work with someone on the 12 Steps.

About Knowledge and Wisdom

For wisdom will enter your heart. Knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

--Proverbs 2:10

The beauty of life is that it doesn't come with a syllabus or a set curriculum. Instead, we are constantly faced with unexpected tests and challenges that help us learn and grow. Whether it's a difficult situation at work or a personal struggle, every experience provides an opportunity to gain new insights and wisdom. Remember that life is the ultimate teacher, and the lessons it teaches us can be invaluable.

--Claudia Gadelha, Former MMA Fighter

Working the 12 Steps is an exercise in self-knowledge. Of course, this applies to me as well. Two years into writing this book, I accidentally deleted the application data where I stored my notes. These files contained summaries of hundreds of books and web clippings.

I panicked, and depression followed. After all, I had 300 more book summaries to add to the file… 300 MORE BOOK SUMMARIES! I paused when I realized how stunningly ridiculous this was. I had fallen again into the trap I described in Section 1.1. Churning through hundreds of books and articles, afraid I might miss something, I accomplished nothing at all.

I watched a video referencing similar behavior framed in terms of dopamine addiction.[1] I learned about "Action Faking," which means doing things that make you think you are making progress when you are not.[2] I thought of Dr. Faustus, who I sympathized with in my youth, and his unquenchable thirst for knowledge.[3] It did not end well for him.

Throughout my life, I have collected hundreds of books on any subject that was even peripherally related to self-improvement and personal development. I mentioned earlier the first self-help book I remember, "I Dare You," by William H. Danforth. There were many others, more than I can possibly recall. There are a few that particularly stand out in my memory.

"Psycho-Cybernetics", Maxwell Maltz
"Looking Out for #1", Robert J. Ringer
"Autobiography of a Yogi", Paramahansa Yogananda
"Transcendental Meditation", Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
"Jonathon Livingston Seagull", Richard Bach
"Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance", Robert M. Pirsig
"Good News for Modern Man", American Bible Society

---

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmLTLkCBSN8
By James Jani, Retrieved 5 Aug 2020

[2] From "Unscripted: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Entrepreneurship" by M. J. DeMarco

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Faustus_(play)

Someday, I may extend this list and perhaps repurchase some of these for nostalgic reasons. While I cannot give specific lessons from each of these books, the sheer variety of the information I sought out was a sure sign of the hunger I had in my soul for knowledge and wisdom.

I purchased and gave away more books than I can count, recalling particularly that I furnished both a progressive church, and an A.A. hall, with small libraries for their members. Then came the digital age.

Taking a moment just now, I browsed my digital collection of books and articles. I have two massive external hard drives connected to my computer; one is a mirror image (a backup) of the other. The numbers of files they contain related to self-help, personal development, psychology, philosophy, religion, and spirituality, number in the hundreds of thousands. At one point, I purchased a copy of the entire Sacred Texts website. I have the entire Grey's Library. I copied entire swaths of Project Gutenberg. I downloaded endless numbers of files from Google Books and the Internet Archive. I scraped the internet with a VPN and BitTorrent. I was relentless, insatiable, hungry, greedy.

While I value these texts, articles, books, and courses, I must also carefully examine the value they provide. A book about knowledge is not knowledge. A book about wisdom is not wisdom. A stack of books, whether physical or digital, are no more than ink on a page or bits on a disk. If they are not read, understood, and absorbed, they are useless.

There are valid and valuable sources of knowledge and wisdom. But true knowledge and wisdom are not found through endless consumption. If you look for answers *out there*, you do not have to spend so much time looking *within*, in yourself. When searching is the goal, you learn nothing.

The lesson is that working the Steps is the priority. Get off the self-improvement merry-go-round. Take the knowledge and wisdom you need to work the Steps and go to work. Your Hero's Journey is your own and cannot be lived vicariously or by proxy. Do not waste time amassing information when you can, instead, make real progress.

Part 3: Knowledge

Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice.

--Anton Chekhov

I can go down to [the hardware store] and buy every tool in there, but that doesn't make me a mechanic, carpenter, or plumber. I have to use the tools and do the work.

--Larry, AA Member

There are no perfect categories for the areas of knowledge that may be useful in working the 12 Steps to a Good Life. Therefore, I have opted for simple practicality in how this information is presented. You will note the categories are similar to those used in life coaching or personal assessment exercises. There are eight categories, described below.

Being is your fundamental state of existence. Even when you sit doing nothing, you are still being. Through some unknown miracle, you possess consciousness in a physical body at this time and place. That is an excellent starting point for Knowledge, since who you are determines everything else. Your state of being is a philosophical and religious well with no bottom.

Doing is any action you take. You are always doing something, even while asleep or unconscious: you breathe, your heart beats, your brain functions. In sleep, you dream. What you do over time shapes who you are. At times you want to act but cannot. At times you do not want to act, yet you do. Self-observation shows that doing is far more complex than merely deciding to act. Vast areas of unconsciousness, outside your immediate awareness, influence what you do (or do not do).

Body refers to your physical existence and quality of life. It is your anchor in the physical universe. If your body cannot move, your consciousness is trapped. If your brain is unhealthy, you cannot think or remember. If your senses are impaired, your knowledge of the universe is limited. If your health deteriorates, so does your engagement and enjoyment of life.

Mind. In my opinion, the human mind is the most haphazardly misused instrument in history. Although it has produced science, philosophy, literature, and art, it is often left untrained on a personal level. An untrained mind creates unhappiness. This is not your fault, but it is your responsibility.

Emotion teaches you to understand and regulate your feelings. Emotions add depth and richness to life. Unregulated, they make you feel tossed about like a small boat on rough seas. Emotions feel like reality, and mistaking them for reality is a grave error. Paradoxically, ignoring or suppressing emotions also creates serious problems.

Spirit is the foundation of your reality. Humans have craved spiritual connection with a greater other as far back as historians and anthropologists can trace. Unfortunately, when spirit is denied or neglected, the joy of life begins to die. Spirituality does not have to be rooted in orthodox religion or dogma. Your primary spiritual experiences result from a personal relationship between you and a Higher Power.

Relationships are the connections you need to live and thrive. There are three kinds of healthy relationships necessary to a good life: your Higher Power, yourself, and other people. The section addresses each of these, with most of the discussion concerning your relationships with others.

Finances may seem an odd subject in a self-help book. But the fact is that finances are often the center of quality-of-life concerns. In any discussion of how to live a good life, financial considerations must be included. Creating a budget, earning and spending, and your basic perception of money are discussed. The section ends with a touching, but practical, view of the difference between "money" and "wealth".

Each of these eight subjects are radically summarized and far from comprehensive. The information is provided to enhance your journey through the Steps as well as stimulate further thought and research.

The last section of Knowledge is called "Practices and Projects". It discusses integrating the principles of the 12 Steps and the Hero's Journey into your life in a balanced way. Not every action or activity fit into a neat category. YOU do not fit into a neat category, nor should you try to do so. Practices and Projects address those desires, values, and activities that are uniquely your own, and encourages you to flourish and thrive in your own way.

For suggestions on reading the Knowledge Section, see "How to Use This Book" in Part 1: Foundation.

3.1 Being

The ground of being is the ground of our being, and when we simply turn outward, we see all of these little problems here and there. But, if we look inward, we see that we are the source of them all.

--Joseph Campbell

How is your now?

--Thomas, AA Member

Being Contents

About Being 133
Truths about Being 133
Worldviews 135
Self-Assessment Exercises 141
Self-Inventory 178

About Being

We are put into the world, I cannot help feeling, to be rather than do.

--Arthur C. Benson

Knowledge of Being is self-knowledge. Through this material you can find out about yourself, what you believe, and how you live. It is neither simple nor easy to take a hard, honest look at yourself and your life. Tragically, many people never find the courage to do so. And yet, the ancient aphorism to "Know thyself"[1] is a basic tenet of many schools of self-development.

Keep in mind that self-knowledge rarely strikes like a bolt of lightning, and fortunately so. Your psyche is like the layers of an onion, and as you peel them back over time, you come to know yourself better. Self-knowledge is a process, not an end.

Although fundamental to working the Steps, attaining self-knowledge is rarely comfortable or easy. If you have difficulty working with this material, put it aside for a while. Consider asking a therapist or mentor to help you.

Know[3.1-01] **Truths about Being**

These statements are simplistic, yet fundamental truths of existence. I risk stating the obvious. Consider them carefully and find your own truths to add to the list.

---

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_thyself

3.1 Being

1. You are ultimately responsible for your own actions and behavior, your decisions, your life, your health, and your happiness. Only you are responsible for living a life of meaning and purpose.

2. The past is over. It is irretrievable. It cannot be changed. Your memories of the past are not the past, but only your impression of it.

3. The future you expect is just that, your expectation. The future is not dependent upon your wants or needs. The future does not exist, it never has. Events can only occur in the present moment.

4. Your actions in the present matter because you cannot act in the past, and you cannot act in the future. You can only act now.

5. Death is inevitable.[2] Now you are alive, someday you will die. You decide how to live, and what to do with the time you have.

6. Regrets and second thoughts are the price of consciousness. With the gift of hindsight but not prescience, Fate has stacked the deck against peace of mind. Acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion release you from the torment of mistakes and loss.

7. Your ego desires predictability and control. But real life is full of impermanence and change. This incongruence between desire and reality causes anxiety, stress, and imbalance.[3]

8. You are not your thoughts,[4] you are not your feelings,[5] you are not your ego,[6] you are awareness.[7] You are "an experiencer of experiences."[8] You do not think your thoughts, you experience them. Your feelings blow through you like wind, and you experience them. Your senses are experiences of the world. Your name is not you; it is a label for the being which experiences being you.

9. Your life consists of moments. You trade your moments for something: anger, love, misery, joy, useful toil, or useless distraction. You decide, every moment, what you trade that moment for.

10. There is more to existence than you know, more to existence than you will ever know. Celebrate! Be joyful! You exist!

---

[2] An excellent discussion of death is in the section "Death" from "Life 101" by John-Roger and Peter McWilliams, 1991

[3] Blinkist: Clipped from: https://www.blinkist.com/en/nc/reader/welcoming-the-unwelcome-en

[4] https://declutterthemind.com/blog/you-are-not-your-thoughts

[5] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201801/are-your-emotions-hijacking-you

[6] Prof. Dr. Hasan ATAK, 2023, "Ego Identity Formation: From Theory to Life"

[7] Anthony DeMello, 1992, "Awareness"

[8] Tim Freke, 2005, "Lucid Living"

Worldviews

> *A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. This vision need not be fully articulated: it may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned; it may not be explicitly developed into a systematic conception of life; it may not be theoretically deepened into a philosophy; it may not even be codified into creedal form; it may be greatly refined through cultural-historical development. Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.*
>
> --James H. Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in
> Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science[9]

Elegantly defining the term, the quote above saves, until the end, how your worldview directly impacts your life: Your worldview is "the set of hinges on which all [your] everyday thinking and doing turns". Awareness of your worldview is infinitely important.[10]

Your worldview is a model of your universe. Elements you did not consciously adopt were absorbed from caretakers, peers, and media. Examining your worldview is necessary for self-understanding.

You do not think a thought, reach a conclusion, or perform an act that does not correspond to your worldview. Your time and effort are well spent to understand it.

Changing your worldview is not easy, but it can be done. Such a task requires patience and persistence. Your worldview best serves you when closely matching reality while furthering personal development.

Know[3.1-02] Finding Your Worldview

There are systematic methods to investigate worldviews,[11] but a simpler way is to look at what your worldview does for you. You use your worldview to answer basic questions about life.[12] Try to state your own beliefs to the following eight questions, and why you believe the way you do:

1. What do you believe is real, the bedrock of your reality? You may believe in God, or gods, or some external or internal force. Perhaps the physical, material universe is all that exists. Or, we live in a multiverse, created or accidental. Your answer to this question affects the remaining questions.

---

[9] James Sire, 1976, " The Universe Next Door,"

[10] James N. Anderson, 2014, "What Is Your Worldview"

[11] David Rousseau and Julie Billingham, mdpi.com; , "A Systematic Framework for Exploring Worldviews and Its Generalization as a Multi-Purpose Inquiry Framework"; Barbara Fisher, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education and Science, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW , "Exploring Worldviews: A Framework", and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldview

[12] Adapted from James Sire, 1976, "The Universe Next Door"

2. What is the nature of reality? Is the universe good or evil, friendly, hostile, or indifferent? Do you create reality, or do you discover it? Do you believe the universe is matter or spirit, order or chaos?

3. What are you? Are you an evolved ape, an image of God, a Divine spark, or a flawed creature destroying the planet? Think about what you are, where you came from, and why you are here.

4. What happens when you die? Do you cease to exist, or do you go on to another state? Do you believe in heaven or hell, reincarnation, or movement to another existence? Why do you believe what you believe?

5. How are you self-aware; what is your "I"? Many believe that consciousness is a product of the physical brain.[13] Others believe that the universe is a product of consciousness.[14] Is awareness a gift from God, a survival trait, or some combination of these?

6. How do you know what is right and wrong? Ethics could be derived from a divine source or be the result of evolutionary trends.[15] The basis of ethical behavior described by the "Golden Rule" is ancient.[16] What is right and wrong? Why do you believe that? How do you know?

7. What is human history? Do you believe all the generations before us paved our way? Is humanity here to create paradise or are we a blight on the planet? Do you think history is linear, in that we constantly improve, or is history circular and we keep repeating the same mistakes?

8. What does your worldview require from you? If you believe the universe consists of meaningless chaos, you might embrace nihilism, or you may think it is your duty to bring order from chaos. If you believe in a God or gods, you probably try to live within a moral framework. Does your worldview require or allow you to embrace pleasure, follow duty, or be true to a certain code of ethics? These questions determine how you try to live your life.

There are different types of worldviews.[17] They express attitudes toward life, beliefs and values, philosophy, and religious practices.

Due to their amorphous nature, the following list of worldviews is both incomplete and overlapping.[18] It contains brief descriptions of religious, political, economic, philosophic, and other types of worldviews. Some of them will coincide with your beliefs. An interesting exercise is to rate each worldview from 0 to 10 on how closely it matches your own beliefs.

People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

---

[13] Thomas Metzinger, 2010, "The Ego Tunnel, The Science of the Mind and…"
[14] Robert Lanza , 2010, "Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness Are the Keys to…"
[15] Biological Altruism, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/altruism-biological/
[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule
[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldview
[18] The original idea for the list came from: Dennis McCallum, 2006, "Organic Discipleship!"; James Sire, 1976, "The Universe Next Door"; James N. Anderson, 2014, "What is Your Worldview"; Descriptions from Wikipedia and other sources

Anarchism: A political philosophy that opposes authority and rejects forced hierarchy. It seeks to abolish the state, viewing it as harmful and unnecessary.

Animism: All things, animals, plants, objects, and places, have a unique spiritual essence and are alive in some way.

Abrahamic Religions: Worship one God who created the universe and reveals divine will through prophets (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). People have free will and choose good or evil and then face final judgment.

Agnosticism: God may or may not exist. If a God exists, it/he/she is unknown or unknowable. Since this question is unanswered, so are those about our origins, purpose, values, and morals.

Atheism: The physical universe is all that exists; there is no God, soul, or spiritual realm. Everything follows physical laws and is the result of random processes. Consciousness is brain-dependent and ends at death. Truth is only what can be measured. There are no objective or ultimate values.

Authoritarianism: A government that maintains power through a strong central authority, rejecting separation of powers, and democracy. It can be controlled by one leader, a small group, a political party, or the military.

Biocentrism:[19] Sees life and consciousness as fundamental to reality. It argues that space and time are mental constructs, and the universe exists because of conscious observers. Rather than life being a byproduct of the cosmos, consciousness precedes the physical universe.

Buddhism: Suffering results from craving temporary things. Seeking happiness in impermanence leads to disappointment. Ending craving frees the soul from karma and reincarnation.

Capitalism: An economic system of private ownership, profit-driven production, and market competition. Prices, goods, and investments are determined by owners and financial markets.

Christianity: An Abrahamic religion based on Jesus' life and teachings. Christians believe he is the prophesied messiah, God's son who died for humanity's sins and rose after three days. There are many variants.

Communism: A system of common ownership aiming to eliminate social classes, money, and the state. It seeks to resolve class conflict through revolution, often violently. Historically, communist regimes have led to oppression and economic failure.

Deism: The belief that God created the universe and is known through reason, not revelation. Deist views vary: (1) God does not intervene in human affairs, (2) God gives design and purpose, (3) God does not intervene but prayer and meditation have spiritual value.

Democracy: A government where people choose leaders and laws, emphasizing rights, freedoms, and equality. It can be direct or representative.

---

[19] Robert Lanza, MD, Bob Berman, 2010, "Biocentrism: How Life and…"

Dualism: The belief that reality is essentially divided into parts or halves, such as good and evil, matter and spirit, mind and body.

Enlightenment Philosophy: A 17th-18th century movement valuing reason, liberty, progress, tolerance, and separation of church and state. Knowledge comes through reason and the senses. Science is a tool for a better society.

Existentialism: A philosophy that sees existence from a human perspective. It states, "existence precedes essence," meaning we define ourselves through experience and choice. Often (but not always) atheistic or agnostic, existentialists view life as absurd, with meaning created by the individual.

Fascism: A nationalist ideology represented by a powerful dictator, a governing autocracy, and suppression of political opposition by force. It advocates government intervention in the economy and authoritarianism.

Haves and Have-Nots:[20] The perception, where those who struggle financially or face setbacks are seen as "Have-Nots," and others with more comfortable lives are "Haves". While "Have-Nots" struggle, "Haves" are seen to be able to draw on virtually unlimited resources.

Hinduism: A diverse system with many beliefs concerning a supreme being including mono- and polytheism. The goal of life is to realize that the individual eternal soul is identical to the supreme soul, which is the oneness and interconnectedness of all things.

Idealism: A metaphysical view that reality is shaped by perception or mind. Subjective idealism holds that objects exist only if perceived, while objective idealism suggests an independent consciousness creates reality. It opposes materialism.

Islam: An Abrahamic monotheistic faith based on the Quran and the teachings of Muhammad. With around 2 billion followers, it is the world's second-largest religion.

Judaism: The oldest Abrahamic religion, a monotheistic faith rooted in the spiritual, cultural, and legal traditions of the Jewish people. It centers on observing the Mosaic covenant through sacred texts and practices.

Libertarianism: A political philosophy prioritizing individual freedom and minimal state interference. It values rule of law, civil rights, and free trade while opposing excessive authority, state power, and coercion.

Materialism: Holds that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all things, including mental states and consciousness, are results of material interactions. Materialism is the opposite of idealism.

Modernism: A movement valuing science, technology, and experimentation to reshape the world. It rejects tradition, prioritizes individualism, and embraces progress, capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, secularization, democracy, and education.

---

[20] I refer here to anecdotal, inter-personal, very local examples, not related to economic theories or class warfare scenarios. You can probably find examples in your own life.

Monism: Existence is fundamentally one thing. Variants include priority monism (a single source), existence monism (the universe as sole reality), substance monism (one underlying reality, e.g., matter or mind), and dual-aspect monism (mental and physical as two facets of one substance).

Mysticism: The pursuit of union with God, spiritual enlightenment, or hidden truths through altered states, practices, or rituals.

Neoplatonism: All things originate from "the One,". The material world reflects an ideal model, and evil is merely the absence of good. Souls can reunite with the universal soul or be trapped by the physical world.

New Age: A diverse spiritual movement since the 1970s, emphasizing individualism and eclectic practices like channeling, divination, crystal work, tarot, runes, and astral projection, with many paths to spirituality.

Nihilism: A view that negates common philosophical concepts like knowledge, existence, and meaning. Existential nihilism sees life as devoid of intrinsic value, while moral nihilism rejects all notions of right and wrong.

Paganism: A group of beliefs that draw from pre-Christian, folkloric, and indigenous traditions. They include polytheism, animism, and pantheism.

Pantheism: The belief that reality and divinity are identical, viewing all things as part of an imminent God. It rejects a personal God and varies in how it relates reality to the divine.

Panentheism: The idea that the divine pervades the universe while transcending it, with some views seeing the universe as a manifestation or part of God. (I like to say that the physical universe is a subset of God.)

Panpsychism: Mind or a mindlike aspect is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of reality. Conscious experience is present everywhere.

Perennialism: A perspective in philosophy and spirituality that views all the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth from which all esoteric and exoteric knowledge and doctrine has grown.

Polytheism: Belief in multiple deities, often in a pantheon (group), representing natural forces or ancestral principles, either as independent beings or aspects of a creator or absolute principle.

Postmodernism: A critique of grand narratives and Enlightenment rationality, stating knowledge is shaped by power. It frames universals like objective truth, reason, science, and progress as social constructs.

Pragmatism: Language and thought cannot describe reality but are tools for solving problems and guiding action. It focuses on practical solutions over big existential questions such as, "What is the meaning of life?"

Psychedelia: Altered states like hallucinations, synesthesia, and trance induced by psychedelics (LSD, DMT, etc.), sometimes causing shifts in self-identity, leading to enlightenment, confusion, or psychosis.

Rationalism: The primary source and test of knowledge is reason. In its purest form, rationalism states that all knowledge can be deducted from basic fundamental principles of logic, mathematics, ethics, and metaphysics.

Realism: Physical reality exists regardless of what we think it is or perceive it to be. It is independent of mental processes or any understanding of it.

Relativism: Denies claims of objectivity in cultural, moral, or epistemological areas. Truth is relative to the observer or the context in which it is assessed. There is no absolute truth or right and wrong; all truth is relative to the individual or within the context of a society or group.

Socialism: Advocates social ownership of production, economic interventions for social justice, and a mixed economy with a regulated capitalist market, income redistribution, and a welfare state.

Spiritism: The belief that immortal spirits temporarily incarnate for growth and can influence the physical world through mediums, for good or ill.

Spiritual but not Religious: Emphasizes individual spiritual growth and well-being of mind, body, and spirit, rejecting dogmatic religious beliefs.

Stoicism: a philosophy that advocates finding happiness by accepting reality, overcoming desires and fears, using reason to understand the world, aligning with nature's plan, and treating others fairly.

Taoism: (pronounced "dow-ism")[21] Emphasizes harmony with the Tao (the Way/source of all) through effortless action, naturalness, simplicity, spontaneity, and virtues like compassion, frugality, and humility.

Theism: broadly defined as the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being or deities. The term often describes the classical conception of God that is found in monotheism or gods found in polytheistic religions.

Traditionalism: Accentuates order, loyalty, conformity, individual purpose, and ethics. God exists beyond the material world but may intercede in it. Humans are created in God's image and are stewards of the natural world.

Transcendentalism: Believes in the innate goodness of people and nature, values self-reliance and independence over societal corruption, emphasizes subjective intuition over empiricism, and advocates generating original insights without deference to past authorities.

Universalism: The belief in singular fundamental, universal truths that transcend boundaries. The opposite of nihilism and relativism.

Utilitarianism: An ethical theory aiming to maximize overall happiness and well-being for all involved individuals by focusing on beneficial consequences that increase utility and prevent harm.

Utopianism: The pursuit of a perfect society with harmony, equality, and justice through reform, technology, or ideology. Its feasibility is debated.

---

[21] https://taoism.net/the-correct-way-to-say-tao/

Wicca: A modern neo-pagan religion blending ancient pagan and hermetic influences, emphasizing nature, magic, and personal rituals.

Zen: A school of meditation, self-restraint, and insight, using breath-counting and koan study to realize enlightenment and interconnectedness. Originating in China, it has spread across Asia and the West.

Zoroastrianism: An ancient Iranian monotheistic religion worshiping Ahura Mazda, emphasizing good vs. evil, free will, judgment, and the eventual triumph of good, influencing concepts like heaven and hell.

The 12 Steps as a Worldview

The 12 Steps, as a practice and philosophy, represent a worldview that is distinctly personal. As you work the Steps, you may find it interesting to describe this worldview in your own words. Such an exercise will help you clarify your understanding of the 12 Steps to a Good Life.

Self-Assessment Exercises[22]

These exercises will help you get to know and understand yourself better:

Satisfaction with Life Scale: Assesses your satisfaction with life as a whole. A short exercise looking at your life overall, rather than specific areas.

Basic Needs Inventory: Paying attention to your basic needs is an important part of surviving, thriving, and living a good life.

Self-Rated Wellness Scale: An informal look at life satisfaction, based on the "Life Wheel"[23] and various "Dimensions of Wellness" scales.[24]

IPIP: Measures five major personality traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Values Clarification: Finding out what is most important to you.[25]

Time Tracking: What you do is what you love, and what you love is what you do. Time tracking gives you an idea of what you find important.

Life Overview: Take a look at the big picture of your life. Seeing that you have limited time to accomplish your goals can be a powerful motivation to pay more attention to what is important.

Powerlessness and Unmanageable Items: Realistic recognition of people and situations beyond your control is a valuable life skill.

Applied Mindfulness Process Scale: Designed to be used during mindfulness-based interventions (i.e., therapy or mindfulness training), but you can use it while you are practicing mindfulness on your own.

---

[22] Printable forms: https://archive.org/search?query=%2312stepstoagoodlife-forms

[23] Rhena Branch, et al, 2007, "Personal Development All-in-One For Dummies", p52

[24] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5508938/

[25] Based on https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/values-clarification

Know[3.1-03] Satisfaction with Life Scale[26]

Taking this 5-minute quiz once a month or so will give you a good look at your current life satisfaction.

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item (or use scratch paper). Please be open and honest in your responses.

7 - Strongly agree
6 - Agree
5 - Slightly agree
4 - Neither agree nor disagree
3 - Slightly disagree
2 - Disagree
1 - Strongly disagree

____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

____ I am satisfied with my life.

____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Sum the scores of the 5 statements and view the interpretation below.

30 – 35 Very high score; highly satisfied

High scorers love their lives and feel things are going well, though not perfect. Satisfaction doesn't mean complacency, as growth and challenges may contribute. Life is enjoyable, with work, school, family, friends, leisure, and personal development going well.

25- 29 High score

Individuals in this range like their lives and feel things are mostly good, though not perfect. Satisfaction doesn't mean complacency, as growth and challenges may contribute. Life is enjoyable, with work, school, family, friends, leisure, and personal development going well, while areas of dissatisfaction may provide motivation.

20 – 24 Average score

The average life satisfaction in developed nations falls in this range, where most people are generally satisfied but seek improvement in some areas. Some feel mostly content with minor improvements needed, while others are satisfied overall but desire major changes in one or two aspects. It is normal to have areas needing growth, and many in this range aim to improve their satisfaction through life changes.

---

[26] Copyright by Ed Diener, February 13, 2006 Text edited for brevity. Usage permission at http://labs.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SWLS.html

15 – 19 Slightly below average in life satisfaction

People in this range often face minor but significant issues in several areas or one major problem despite overall stability. If dissatisfaction is temporary due to recent events, it usually improves over time. However, chronic dissatisfaction across multiple areas may require reflection and change. Some may find motivation in slight dissatisfaction, but widespread discontent can be distracting and unpleasant.

10 – 14 Dissatisfied

People in this range are significantly dissatisfied, with multiple struggles or one major issue. If due to a recent event like loss or divorce, satisfaction may improve over time. However, chronic dissatisfaction suggests a need for changes in mindset and life activities. Persistent low satisfaction can hinder functioning, making support from friends, clergy, or counselors helpful, though change ultimately depends on the individual.

5 – 9 Extremely Dissatisfied

People in this range are deeply unhappy, whether due to a recent crisis like loss or unemployment, a chronic issue like addiction, or dissatisfaction in multiple areas. Seeking support from friends, family, clergy, or counselors can be helpful. If unhappiness is chronic, change is needed, and others can often assist in the process.

Understanding Life Satisfaction Scores

Life satisfaction is shaped by several key factors, with social relationships being one of the most important. People with close, supportive family and friends tend to be happier, while those lacking strong connections are more likely to be dissatisfied. Loss of a loved one can lower satisfaction, often requiring time to recover. Work, school, or fulfilling roles such as homemaking also play a significant role. Enjoyable and meaningful work contributes to well-being, whereas poor job fit or frustrating circumstances can reduce satisfaction. Similarly, struggling to achieve important goals can lead to dissatisfaction.

Personal fulfillment, including self-acceptance, spirituality, learning, and leisure, also influences satisfaction. When these aspects are nurtured, they bring contentment, but when frustrated, they become sources of unhappiness. Other factors, such as health, are universally important, while some sources of satisfaction are unique to individuals. There is no single key to happiness, but people often improve their satisfaction over time through personal growth, relationship changes, or aligning with meaningful goals. For those who are chronically dissatisfied, self-reflection on attitudes and values can be an important step toward greater fulfillment.

Know[3.1-04] Basic Needs Inventory

There are multiple models of basic needs. Choose one that appeals to you and use it as a template to determine how well your life is balanced. Areas of your life where your needs are not being met require additional attention.

Keep in mind these are not options, but needs. Basic needs are hardwired into you and go beyond requirements for air, water, and food. They include relationships and striving to reach your full potential. Living a good life means taking care of all your needs.

Your emotional state provides clues as to whether your needs are being met.[27] For example, you may feel angry, afraid, sad, or disconnected when your needs are not met. When your needs are met, you feel relaxed, peaceful, trusting, and fulfilled.

The caveat, of course, is that your emotions are not "facts," but indicators of how you perceive yourself within reality. You may be angry or afraid when someone intimidates you. This indicates your safety needs are not met. But you may be perfectly safe and still feel anger or anxiety. It takes practice and knowledge to discern the validity of your emotions in relation to how well your needs are met.

Maslow's Hierarchy[28]

Maslow described five levels of needs, often arranged graphically in a pyramid. It is generally understood that an individual will seek to fill basic needs before addressing those at a higher level, but there are exceptions and overlap. As you look at these levels of needs, compare them to your life to see what areas you may need to work on. Every level is important to maintain a balanced life. The five levels from "lowest" to "highest" are:

Physiological: air, food, water, shelter, sex, homeostasis, excretion
Safety: security of body, family, resources, and property
Belongingness and love: intimate relationships, friends, family
Esteem: prestige, confidence, accomplishment, respect
Self-Actualization: achieving one's full potential, creative activities

Danforth's Four Key Components[29]

In the book "I Dare You," William H. Danforth describes 4 components of living he divided into adjacent squares, like a checkerboard. He suggests a bold program of "personal dares" to improve each of these four areas of life.

Physical: health, sleep, nutrition, posture, exercise
Mental: good habits, creativity, reading, lifelong learning
Social: community, service, friendship, personal development
Religious (Spiritual): character, spiritual growth, moral courage

---

[27] Originally from http://www.SchoolTransformation.com; no longer available.
[28] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs
[29] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_H._Danforth

Jonathon Fields' Three Buckets[30]

In a simple, elegant metaphor, Fields presents human needs as three buckets you need to keep filled:

Vitality: Physical and mental health, energy, resilience, and calm
Connection: Relationships, friendships, and a sense of belonging
Contribution: Using your gifts and talents in a meaningful way

He also adds "Three Laws of the Buckets" which bring a practical sense of urgency to his ideas:

1. The buckets leak, meaning you must work on all areas, all the time.
2. Your emptiest bucket will drag the others down with it. If one part of your life is not balanced, your whole life is out of balance.
3. The buckets never lie. If you ignore any part of your life, that bucket empties out. You will be unhappy.

Gaur Gopal Das - Four Tires on a Car[31]

Just as you cannot travel in a car without four good tires, you cannot live your life well without paying attention to four important areas of your life. These are: your personal life, relationships, work life, and social contributions. Finally, your spiritual life is the steering wheel.

1. Personal life: reduce worry and develop spirituality and gratitude.
2. Relationships: look for the good in people and forgive their mistakes.
3. Work Life: compete with yourself, not others. Find the parts of your job you love and concentrate on those. Use your free time for something worthwhile that enjoy and adds value to your life.
4. Social Contributions: give to the right cause for the right reason. Start with those close to you. Do not waste your resources.
5. Spiritual Life: maintain the other four areas of your life and consider spiritual practices, such as prayer and meditation.

Basic Needs Inventory Conclusion

There are many ways to look at how well your needs are filled. You are responsible for making sure your needs are filled, and this must be done in such a way as to not restrict or impede the wellness of others. Note that every model of needs fulfillment has, as a component, the requirement for social and/or spiritual connection. Do not ignore or minimize this need.

These brief summaries are conceptual models, tools to help you understand the importance of addressing your own needs. They should be sufficient for you to copy or create your own model of wellness that is tailored to you and your circumstances. Try out different ideas to help you keep your own needs addressed and in perspective.

---

[30] Jonathon Fields, 2016, "How to Live a Good Life"

[31] Gaur Gopal Das, "Life's Amazing Secrets", 2018, Blinkist Summary

Know[3.1-05] Self-Rated Wellness Scale[32]

This scale is intended to estimate your happiness over the last month with your life in each of the areas listed below. Ask yourself the following question as you rate each area: "How happy am I with this area of my life?" Rate each area between 1 and 10, where 1 is Very Unhappy and 10 means Very Happy.

This is an unscientific self-evaluation. The higher your scores, the better you rate your happiness. Low scores illustrate areas you may want to work on. Feel free to add to or change the categories to fit your life. Disregard those that do not apply to you. For an overall average, add your scores and divide by the total number of line items.

Job / Education / Retirement ___________

Finances ___________

Legal Issues ___________

Weight / Health / Exercise ___________

Sleep ___________

Friend Relationships ___________

Family Relationships ___________

Romantic Relationships ___________

Sex Life ___________

Emotional Life ___________

Communication ___________

Spirituality ___________

Free Time / Hobbies ___________

Drinking / Drug Use ___________

---

32 More information can be found here:
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5508938
https://nationalwellness.org/resources/six-dimensions-of-wellness/
https://www.lifeofwellness.ca/8-dimensions-of-wellness/
https://www.grcc.edu/humanresources/wellness/sevendimensionsofwellness
https://www.rwu.edu/undergraduate/student-life/health-and-counseling/health-education-program/dimensions-wellness
https://www.northwestern.edu/wellness/8-dimensions/
https://www.rollins.edu/wellness-center/nine-dimensions-of-wellness/
https://allwork.space/2019/05/how-to-address-the-7-dimensions-of-wellness-in-the-workplace/
https://www.wm.edu/offices/wellness/about/eight-dimensions/index.php
https://ung.edu/campus-recreation-and-wellness/dimensions-of-wellness.php

Know[3.1-06] The Big Five Personality Assessment Tool[33]

The Big Five Personality Assessment Tool (IPIP). The IPIP is the International Personality Inventory Pool. The items and scales are in the public domain, which means that one can copy, edit, translate, or use them for any purpose without asking permission and without paying a fee. The IPIP home page is https://ipip.ori.org/index.htm.

Dr. John A. Johnson, Professor of Psychology, Penn State University, wrote descriptions of the five domains (The Big Five: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) and thirty subdomains.[34] These descriptions are based on the scientific literature of personality measurement. Dr. Johnson is acknowledged as the author of these materials and has placed them in the public domain.

This report estimates the individual's level on each of the five broad personality domains of the Five-Factor Model. Each of the five domains are comprised of six subdomains.

Please keep in mind that "low," "average," and "high" scores on a personality test are neither absolutely good nor bad. A particular level on any trait will probably be neutral or irrelevant for a great many activities, be helpful for accomplishing some things, and detrimental for accomplishing other things. As with any personality inventory, scores and descriptions can only approximate an individual's actual personality.

On each set of six subdomain scales it is somewhat uncommon but certainly possible to score high in some of the subdomains and low in the others. In such cases more attention should be paid to the subdomain scores than to the broad domain score. Questions about the accuracy of your results are best resolved by showing your report to people who know you well.

A Note on Scoring: The online test compares your score to others of your sex and age, categorizing results as Low (bottom 30%), Average (middle 40%), or High (top 30%). Since this written test is self-scored, it offers a convenient resource rather than precise results. Consider your score a broad overview, not a definitive assessment.

Taking the IPIP 120: The following pages contain phrases describing people's behaviors. You are to rate these phrases to describe how accurately each one describes you. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself.

You may want to make a copy of the test and scoring pages so you can retake it at a future date. Take your time, every statement affects your final score. Please read each statement carefully, and then write the number that corresponds to the accuracy of the statement on the blank line preceding it.

---

33 The description, instructions, scoring text, and format of the test have been modified for brevity and presentation. The instructions for scoring have been expanded and simplified. The questions and meaning of the scoring text have not been changed.
34 May be edited for brevity.

3.1 Being

Use these numbers to rate each statement:

1 - Very Inaccurate
2 - Moderately Inaccurate
3 - Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate
4 - Moderately Accurate
5 - Very Accurate

1. ______ Worry about things.
2. ______ Make friends easily.
3. ______ Have a vivid imagination.
4. ______ Trust others.
5. ______ Complete tasks successfully.
6. ______ Get angry easily.
7. ______ Love large parties.
8. ______ See beauty in things that others might not notice.
9. ______ Use flattery to get ahead.
10. ______ Like order
11. ______ Often feel blue.
12. ______ Take charge.
13. ______ Experience my emotions intensely.
14. ______ Make people feel welcome.
15. ______ Keep my promises.
16. ______ Find it difficult to approach others.
17. ______ Am always busy.
18. ______ Prefer to stick with things that I know.
19. ______ Love a good fight.
20. ______ Work hard.

Use these numbers to rate each statement:

1 - Very Inaccurate
2 - Moderately Inaccurate
3 - Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate
4 - Moderately Accurate
5 - Very Accurate

21. _______ Often eat too much.

22. _______ Love excitement.

23. _______ Am not interested in abstract ideas.

24. _______ Believe that I am better than others.

25. _______ Start tasks right away.

26. _______ Feel that I'm unable to deal with things.

27. _______ Radiate joy.

28. _______ Tend to vote for liberal political candidates.

29. _______ Sympathize with the homeless.

30. _______ Jump into things without thinking.

31. _______ Fear for the worst.

32. _______ Warm up quickly to others.

33. _______ Enjoy wild flights of fantasy.

34. _______ Believe that others have good intentions.

35. _______ Excel in what I do.

36. _______ Get irritated easily.

37. _______ Talk to a lot of different people at parties.

38. _______ Do not like art.

39. _______ Know how to get around the rules.

40. _______ Like to tidy up.

Use these numbers to rate each statement:

1 - Very Inaccurate
2 - Moderately Inaccurate
3 - Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate
4 - Moderately Accurate
5 - Very Accurate

41. _______ Dislike myself.
42. _______ Try to lead others.
43. _______ Seldom get emotional.
44. _______ Love to help others.
45. _______ Tell the truth.
46. _______ Am easily intimidated.
47. _______ Am always on the go.
48. _______ Dislike changes.
49. _______ Yell at people.
50. _______ Do more than what's expected of me.
51. _______ Go on binges.
52. _______ Seek adventure.
53. _______ Avoid philosophical discussions.
54. _______ Think highly of myself.
55. _______ Find it difficult to get down to work.
56. _______ Remain calm under pressure.
57. _______ Have a lot of fun.
58. _______ Believe in one true religion.
59. _______ Feel sympathy for those who worse off than myself
60. _______ Make rash decisions.

Use these numbers to rate each statement:

1 - Very Inaccurate
2 - Moderately Inaccurate
3 - Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate
4 - Moderately Accurate
5 - Very Accurate

61. _______ Am afraid of many things.

62. _______ Feel comfortable around people.

63. _______ Love to daydream.

64. _______ Trust what people say.

65. _______ Handle tasks smoothly.

66. _______ Lose my temper.

67. _______ Don't like crowded events.

68. _______ Do not like poetry.

69. _______ Cheat to get ahead.

70. _______ Leave a mess in my room.

71. _______ Am often down in the dumps.

72. _______ Take control of things.

73. _______ Am not easily affected by my emotions.

74. _______ Am concerned about others.

75. _______ Break my promises.

76. _______ Am not embarrassed easily.

77. _______ Do a lot in my spare time.

78. _______ Don't like the idea of change.

79. _______ Insult people.

80. _______ Set high standards for myself and others.

Use these numbers to rate each statement:

1 - Very Inaccurate
2 - Moderately Inaccurate
3 - Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate
4 - Moderately Accurate
5 - Very Accurate

81. _______ Rarely overindulge.
82. _______ Love action.
83. _______ Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.
84. _______ Have a high opinion of myself.
85. _______ Need a push to get started.
86. _______ Know how to cope.
87. _______ Love life.
88. _______ Tend to vote for conservative political candidates.
89. _______ Suffer from others' sorrows.
90. _______ Rush into things.
91. _______ Get stressed out easily.
92. _______ Act comfortably with others.
93. _______ Like to get lost in thought.
94. _______ Distrust people.
95. _______ Know how to get things done.
96. _______ Rarely get irritated.
97. _______ Avoid crowds.
98. _______ Do not enjoy going to art museums.
99. _______ Take advantage of others.
100. _______ Leave my belongings around.

Use these numbers to rate each statement:

1 - Very Inaccurate
2 - Moderately Inaccurate
3 - Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate
4 - Moderately Accurate
5 - Very Accurate

101. _______ Have a low opinion of myself.
102. _______ Wait for others to lead the way.
103. _______ Experience very few emotional highs and lows.
104. _______ Turn my back on others.
105. _______ Get others to do my duties.
106. _______ Am able to stand up for myself.
107. _______ Can manage many things at the same time.
108. _______ Am attached to conventional ways.
109. _______ Get back at others.
110. _______ Am not highly motivated to succeed.
111. _______ Am able to control my cravings.
112. _______ Enjoy being reckless.
113. _______ Am not interested in theoretical discussions.
114. _______ Make myself the center of attention.
115. _______ Have difficulty starting tasks.
116. _______ Am calm even in tense situations.
117. _______ Laugh aloud.
118. _______ Like to stand during the national anthem.
119. _______ Am not interested in other people's problems.
120. _______ Act without thinking.

How to Score the IPIP 120:[35]

Manually scoring the IPIP is tedious. If you persevere, however, you will gain clinically valid insight into your personality. Be careful that you accurately copy and score your answers. Every answer affects the final result.

The scoring page that follows is a list of the five major personality categories. Each category is followed by its respective sub-categories. On the line with each sub-category is a list of some of the phrase numbers from the quiz you just completed. For example, on the Score Sheet page you will see:

Openness to Experience
Imagination: 3__, 33__, 63__, 93__ = ____
Artistic Interests: 8__, 38R__, 68R__, 98R__ = ____

"Openness to Experience" is the personality category, and "Imagination" is a subcategory. For each of the numbers following "Imagination" (3, 33, 63, 93), find your answer to that question on the quiz and write it in the short blank following the number. Add the total of the four numbers at the end of the line. That is your score for "Imagination". (Note that the questions for each sub-category are always separated by 30: 3… 33… 63… 93. This makes it easier to keep track of what you are doing.)

On the next line you see "Artistic Interests". The questions are 8, 38, 68, and 98. Look at your answer for question 8 and write it in the blank. Notice that the remaining numbers are followed by an "R". Numbers followed by an "R" are reverse scored, as follows:

Count "5" as a score of "1".

Count "4 as a score of "2".

Count "3" as a score of "3".

Count "2" as a score of "4".

Count "1" as a score of "5".

The numbers with an "R" are there because the test is designed to filter your answers and be as accurate as possible. So, for "Artistic Interests", number 38R, look at your test answer for question 38. If you answered it as a "5", you score it as "1". If you answered "4", score it as "2", and so on.

Once you add up your scores for each sub-category, the sum of the sub-categories is your score for the category. There are five categories, and each category has six sub-categories.

Take your time. Write your answers into the appropriate blank, being careful to reverse score the "R" questions as described above. When you have added up all the categories and sub-categories, proceed to the Trait Descriptions interpretation following the scoring page.

---

35 Thanks to Cheri, AA Member, for requesting clarification on scoring.

Openness to Experience

Imagination: 3__, 33__, 63__, 93__ = _____
Artistic Interests: 8__, 38R__, 68R__, 98R__ = _____
Emotionality: 13__, 43R__, 73R__, 103R__ = _____
Adventurousness: 18R__, 48R__, 78R__, 108R__ = _____
Intellect: 23R__, 53R__, 83R__, 113R__ = _____
Liberalism: 28__, 58R__, 88R__, 118R__ = _____
Openness to Experience Total = _____

Conscientiousness

Self-Efficacy: 5__, 35__, 65__, 95__ = _____
Orderliness: 10__, 40__, 70R__, 100R__ = _____
Dutifulness: 15__, 45__, 75R__, 105R__ = _____
Achievement Striving: 20__, 50__, 80__, 110R__ = _____
Self-Discipline: 25__, 55R__, 85R__, 115R__ = _____
Cautiousness: 30R__, 60R__, 90R__, 120R__ = _____
Conscientiousness Total = _____

Extraversion

Friendliness: 2__, 32__, 62__, 92__ = _____
Gregariousness: 7__, 37__, 67R__, 97R__ = _____
Assertiveness: 12__, 42__, 72__, 102R__ = _____
Activity Level: 17__, 47__, 77__, 107__ = _____
Excitement Seeking: 22__, 52__, 82__, 112__ = _____
Cheerfulness: 27__, 57__, 87__, 117__ = _____
Extraversion Total = _____

Agreeableness

Trust: 4__, 34__, 64__, 94R__ = _____
Morality: 9R__, 39R__, 69R__, 99R__ = _____
Altruism: 14__, 44__, 74__, 104R__ = _____
Cooperation: 19R__, 49R__, 79R__, 109R__ = _____
Modesty: 24R__, 54R__, 84R__, 114R__ = _____
Sympathy: 29__, 59__, 89__, 119R__ = _____
Agreeableness Total = _____

Neuroticism

Anxiety: 1__, 31__, 61__, 91__ = _____
Anger: 6__, 36__, 66__, 96R__ = _____
Depression: 11__, 41__, 71__, 101__ = _____
Self-consciousness: 16__, 46__, 76R__, 106R__ = _____
Immoderation: 21__, 51__, 81R__, 111R__ = _____
Vulnerability: 26__, 56R__, 86R__, 116R__ = _____
Neuroticism Total = _____

Openness to Experience

Total Score: 1 to 36 LOW, 37 to 84 AVERAGE, 85 to 120 HIGH.

LOW, you like to think in plain and simple terms. Others describe you as down-to-earth, practical, and conservative.

AVERAGE, you enjoy tradition but are willing to try new things. Your thinking is neither simple nor complex. To others you appear to be a well-educated person but not an intellectual.

HIGH, you enjoy novelty, variety, and change. You are curious, imaginative, and creative.

Openness to Experience describes a dimension of cognitive style that distinguishes imaginative, creative people from down-to-earth, conventional people. Open people are intellectually curious, appreciative of art, and sensitive to beauty. They tend to be, compared to closed people, more aware of their feelings. They tend to think and act in individualistic and nonconforming ways. Intellectuals typically score high on Openness to Experience; consequently, this factor has also been called Culture or Intellect. Nonetheless, Intellect is probably best regarded as one aspect of openness to experience. Scores on Openness to Experience are only modestly related to years of education and scores on standard intelligent tests.

Another characteristic of the open cognitive style is a facility for thinking in symbols and abstractions far removed from concrete experience. Depending on the individual's specific intellectual abilities, this symbolic cognition may take the form of mathematical, logical, or geometric thinking, artistic and metaphorical use of language, music composition or performance, or one of the many visual or performing arts. People with low scores on openness to experience tend to have narrow, common interests. They prefer the plain, straightforward, and obvious over the complex, ambiguous, and subtle. They may regard the arts and sciences with suspicion, regarding these endeavors as abstruse or of no practical use. Closed people prefer familiarity over novelty; they are conservative and resistant to change.

Openness is often presented as healthier or more mature by psychologists, who are often themselves open to experience. However, open and closed styles of thinking are useful in different environments. The intellectual style of the open person may serve a professor well, but research has shown that closed thinking is related to superior job performance in police work, sales, and a number of service occupations.

Imagination as a Subdomain of Openness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

To imaginative individuals, the real world is often too plain and ordinary. High scorers on this scale use fantasy as a way of creating a richer, more interesting world. Low scorers are on this scale are more oriented to facts than fantasy.

Artistic Interests as a Subdomain of Openness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers on this scale love beauty, both in art and in nature. They become easily involved and absorbed in artistic and natural events. They are not necessarily artistically trained nor talented, although many will be. The defining features of this scale are interest in, and appreciation of natural and artificial beauty. Low scorers lack aesthetic sensitivity and interest in the arts.

Emotionality as a Subdomain of Openness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Persons high on Emotionality have good access to and awareness of their own feelings. Low scorers are less aware of their feelings and tend not to express their emotions openly.

Adventurousness as a Subdomain of Openness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers on adventurousness are eager to try new activities, travel to foreign lands, and experience different things. They find familiarity and routine boring and will take a new route home just because it is different. Low scorers tend to feel uncomfortable with change and prefer familiar routines.

Intellect as a Subdomain of Openness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Intellect and artistic interests are key aspects of openness to experience. High scorers enjoy exploring ideas, debating, and solving puzzles, while low scorers prefer practical matters and see intellectual exercises as pointless. Intellect reflects intellectual style, not ability, though high scorers tend to perform slightly better on intelligence tests.

Liberalism as a Subdomain to Openness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Psychological liberalism reflects a willingness to challenge authority, tradition, and convention, sometimes to the point of rejecting rules and embracing chaos. Psychological conservatives value stability and security through tradition. While not the same as political affiliation, these traits often influence political leanings.

Conscientiousness

Total Score: 1 to 36 LOW, 37 to 84 AVERAGE, 85 to 120 HIGH.

LOW, you like to live for the moment and do what feels good now. Your work tends to be careless and disorganized.

AVERAGE, you are reasonably reliable, organized, and self-controlled.

HIGH, you set clear goals and pursue them with determination. People regard you as reliable and hard-working.

Conscientiousness concerns the way in which we control, regulate, and direct our impulses. Impulses are not inherently bad; occasionally time constraints require a snap decision and acting on our first impulse can be an effective response. Also, in times of play rather than work, acting spontaneously and impulsively can be fun. Impulsive individuals can be seen by others as colorful, fun-to-be-with, and zany.

Nonetheless, acting on impulse can lead to trouble in a number of ways. Some impulses are antisocial. Uncontrolled antisocial acts not only harm other members of society, but also can result in retribution toward the perpetrator of such impulsive acts. Another problem with impulsive acts is that they often produce immediate rewards but undesirable, long-term consequences. Examples include excessive socializing that leads to being fired from one's job, hurling an insult that causes the breakup of an important relationship, or using pleasure-inducing drugs that eventually destroy one's health.

Impulsive behavior, even when not seriously destructive, diminishes a person's effectiveness in significant ways. Acting impulsively disallows contemplating alternative courses of action, some of which would have been wiser than the impulsive choice. Impulsivity also sidetracks people during projects that require organized sequences of steps or stages. Accomplishments of an impulsive person are therefore small, scattered, and inconsistent.

A hallmark of intelligence, distinguishing humans from earlier life forms, is the ability to consider future consequences before acting on impulse. Intelligence involves setting long-term goals, planning, and persisting despite short-term urges. This connection to impulse control is reflected in **prudence**, another term for the Conscientiousness domain, meaning both wise and cautious. Those who score high in Conscientiousness are often seen as intelligent.

The benefits of high conscientiousness are obvious. Conscientious individuals avoid trouble and achieve high levels of success through purposeful planning and persistence. They are also positively regarded by others as intelligent and reliable. On the negative side, they can be compulsive perfectionists and workaholics. Furthermore, extremely conscientious individuals might be regarded as stuffy and boring. Unconscientious people may be criticized for their unreliability, lack of ambition, and failure to stay within the lines, but they will experience many short-lived pleasures and they will never be called stuffy.

Self-Efficacy as a Subdomain of Conscientiousness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Self-Efficacy describes confidence in one's ability to accomplish things. High scorers believe they have the intelligence (common sense), drive, and self-control necessary for achieving success. Low scorers do not feel effective and may have a sense that they are not in control of their lives.

Orderliness as a Subdomain of Conscientiousness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Persons with high scores on orderliness are well-organized. They like to live according to routines and schedules. They keep lists and make plans. Low scorers tend to be disorganized and scattered.

Dutifulness as a Subdomain of Conscientiousness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

This scale reflects the strength of a person's sense of duty and obligation. Those who score high on this scale have a strong sense of moral obligation. Low scorers find contracts, rules, and regulations overly confining. They are likely to be seen as unreliable or even irresponsible.

Achievement-Striving as a Subdomain of Conscientiousness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Individuals who score high on this scale strive hard to achieve excellence. Their drive to be recognized as successful keeps them on track toward their lofty goals. They often have a strong sense of direction in life, but extremely high scores may be too single-minded and obsessed with their work. Low scorers are content to get by with a minimal amount of work, and might be seen by others as lazy.

Self-Discipline as a Subdomain of Conscientiousness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Self-discipline, what many people call will-power, refers to the ability to persist at difficult or unpleasant tasks until they are completed. People who possess high self-discipline are able to overcome reluctance to begin tasks and stay on track despite distractions. Those with low self-discipline procrastinate and show poor follow-through, often failing to complete tasks-even tasks they want very much to complete.

Cautiousness as a Subdomain of Conscientiousness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Cautiousness describes the disposition to think through possibilities before acting. High scorers on the Cautiousness scale take their time when making decisions. Low scorers often say or do first the thing that comes to mind without deliberating alternatives and the probable consequences of those alternatives.

Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 36 LOW, 37 to 84 AVERAGE, 85 to 120 HIGH.

LOW, you are introverted, reserved, and quiet. You enjoy solitude and solitary activities. Your socializing tends to be restricted to a few close friends.

AVERAGE, you are neither a subdued loner nor a jovial chatterbox. You enjoy time with others but also time alone.

HIGH, you are sociable, outgoing, energetic, and lively. You prefer to be around people much of the time.

Extraversion is marked by pronounced engagement with the external world. Extraverts enjoy being with people, are full of energy, and often experience positive emotions. They tend to be enthusiastic, action-oriented, individuals who are likely to say "Yes!" or "Let's go!" to opportunities for excitement. In groups they like to talk, assert themselves, and draw attention to themselves.

Introverts lack the exuberance, energy, and activity levels of extraverts. They tend to be quiet, low-key, deliberate, and disengaged from the social world. Their lack of social involvement should not be interpreted as shyness or depression; the introvert simply needs less stimulation than an extravert and prefers to be alone. The independence and reserve of the introvert is sometimes mistaken as unfriendliness or arrogance. In reality, an introvert who scores high on the agreeableness dimension will not seek others out but will be quite pleasant when approached.

Friendliness as a Subdomain of Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Friendly people genuinely like other people and openly demonstrate positive feelings toward others. They make friends quickly and it is easy for them to form close, intimate relationships. Low scorers on Friendliness are not necessarily cold and hostile, but they do not reach out to others and are perceived as distant and reserved.

Gregariousness as a Subdomain of Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Gregarious people find the company of others pleasantly stimulating and rewarding. They enjoy the excitement of crowds. Low scorers tend to feel overwhelmed by, and therefore actively avoid, large crowds. They do not necessarily dislike being with people sometimes, but their need for privacy and time to themselves is much greater than for individuals who score high on this scale.

Assertiveness as a Subdomain of Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers of Assertiveness like to speak out, take charge, and direct the activities of others. They tend to be leaders in groups. Low scorers tend not to talk much and let others control the activities of groups.

Activity Level as a Subdomain of Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Active individuals lead fast-paced, busy lives. They move about quickly, energetically, and vigorously, and they are involved in many activities. People who score low on this scale follow a slower and more leisurely, relaxed pace.

Excitement-Seeking as a Subdomain of Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers on this scale are easily bored without high levels of stimulation. They love bright lights and hustle and bustle. They are likely to take risks and seek thrills. Low scorers are overwhelmed by noise and commotion and are averse to thrill-seeking.

Cheerfulness as a Subdomain of Extraversion

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

This scale measures positive mood and feelings, not negative emotions (which are a part of the Neuroticism domain). Persons who score high on this scale typically experience a range of positive feelings, including happiness, enthusiasm, optimism, and joy. Low scorers are not as prone to such energetic, high spirits.

Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 36 LOW, 37 to 84 AVERAGE, 85 to 120 HIGH.

LOW, you have less concern with others' needs than with your own. People see you as tough, critical, and uncompromising.

AVERAGE, you display some concern with others' needs, but, generally, show unwillingness to sacrifice yourself for others.

HIGH, indicates a strong interest in others' needs and well-being. You are pleasant, sympathetic, and cooperative.

Agreeableness reflects individual differences in concern with cooperation and social harmony. Agreeable individuals value getting along with others. They are therefore considerate, friendly, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise their interests with others'. Agreeable people also have an optimistic view of human nature. They believe people are basically honest, decent, and trustworthy.

Disagreeable individuals place self-interest above getting along with others. They are generally unconcerned with others' well-being, and therefore are unlikely to extend themselves for other people. Sometimes their skepticism about others' motives causes them to be suspicious, unfriendly, and uncooperative.

Agreeableness is obviously advantageous for attaining and maintaining popularity. Agreeable people are better liked than disagreeable people. On the other hand, agreeableness is not useful in situations that require tough or absolute objective decisions. Disagreeable people can make excellent scientists, critics, or soldiers.

Trust as a Subdomain of Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

A person with high trust assumes that most people are fair, honest, and have good intentions. Persons low in trust see others as selfish, devious, and potentially dangerous.

Morality as a Subdomain of Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers on this scale are candid, sincere, and see no need for pretense or manipulation. Low scorers believe some deception is necessary in social interactions, making them more guarded but not immoral. People generally find it easier to relate to the straightforward nature of high scorers than to the reserved approach of low scorers.

Altruism as a Subdomain of Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Altruistic people find helping other people genuinely rewarding. Consequently, they are generally willing to assist those who are in need. Altruistic people find that doing things for others is a form of self-fulfillment rather than self-sacrifice. Low scorers on this scale do not particularly like helping those in need. Requests for help feel like an imposition rather than an opportunity for self-fulfillment.

Cooperation as a Subdomain of Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Individuals who score high on this scale dislike confrontations. They are perfectly willing to compromise or to deny their own needs in order to get along with others. Those who score low on this scale are more likely to intimidate others to get their way.

Modesty as a Subdomain of Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers on this scale do not like to claim that they are better than other people. In some cases, this attitude may derive from low self-confidence or self-esteem. Nonetheless, some people with high self-esteem find immodesty unseemly. Those who are willing to describe themselves as superior tend to be seen as disagreeably arrogant by other people.

Sympathy as a Subdomain of Agreeableness

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

People who score high on this scale are tenderhearted and compassionate. They are empathetic and easily moved to pity. Low scorers are less affected by suffering and try to make objective judgments based on reason. They are more concerned with truth and impartial justice.

Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 36 LOW, 37 to 84 AVERAGE, 85 to 120 HIGH.

LOW, you are exceptionally calm, composed and unflappable. You do not react with intense emotions, even to situations that most people would describe as stressful.

AVERAGE, your level of emotional reactivity is typical of the general population. Stressful and frustrating situations are somewhat upsetting to you, but you are generally able to get over these feelings and cope with these situations.

HIGH, you are easily upset, even by what most people consider the normal demands of living. People consider you to be sensitive and emotional.

Freud originally used the term neurosis to describe a condition marked by mental distress, emotional suffering, and an inability to cope effectively with the normal demands of life. He suggested that everyone shows some signs of neurosis, but that we differ in our degree of suffering and our specific symptoms of distress. Today neuroticism refers to the tendency to experience negative feelings. Those who score high on Neuroticism may experience primarily one specific negative feeling such as anxiety, anger, or depression, but are likely to experience several of these emotions. People high in neuroticism are emotionally reactive. They respond emotionally to events that would not affect most people, and their reactions tend to be more intense than normal. They are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult. Their negative emotional reactions tend to persist for unusually long periods of time, which means they are often in a bad mood. These problems in emotional regulation can diminish a neurotic's ability to think clearly, make decisions, and cope effectively with stress.

At the other end of the scale, individuals who score low in neuroticism are less easily upset and are less emotionally reactive. They tend to be calm, emotionally stable, and free from persistent negative feelings. Freedom from negative feelings does not mean that low scorers experience a lot of positive feelings; frequency of positive emotions is a component of the Extraversion domain.

Anxiety as a Subdomain of Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

The "fight-or-flight" system of the brain of anxious individuals is too easily and too often engaged. Therefore, people who are high in anxiety often feel like something dangerous is about to happen. They may be afraid of specific situations or be just generally fearful. They feel tense, jittery, and nervous. Persons low in Anxiety are generally calm and fearless.

Anger as a Subdomain of Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Persons who score high in Anger feel enraged when things do not go their way. They are sensitive about being treated fairly and feel resentful and bitter when they think they are being cheated. This scale measures the tendency to feel angry; whether or not the person expresses annoyance and hostility depends on the individual's level on Agreeableness. Low scorers do not get angry often or easily.

Depression as a Subdomain of Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

This scale measures the tendency to feel sad, dejected, and discouraged. High scorers lack energy and have difficulty initiating activities. Low scorers tend to be free from these depressive feelings.

Self-Consciousness as a Subdomain of Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Self-conscious individuals worry about others' opinions, feeling shy, embarrassed, and uncomfortable. Their fear of criticism is often exaggerated, yet their awkwardness can reinforce it. Low scorers, by contrast, are not overly concerned with being judged and remain confident in social situations.

Immoderation as a Subdomain of Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

Immoderate individuals feel strong cravings and urges that they have difficulty resisting. They tend to be oriented toward short-term pleasures and rewards rather than long- term consequences. Low scorers do not experience strong, irresistible cravings and consequently do not find themselves tempted to overindulge.

Vulnerability as a Subdomain of Neuroticism

Scores: 1 to 6 LOW, 7 to 14 AVERAGE, 15 to 20 HIGH.

High scorers on Vulnerability experience panic, confusion, and helplessness when under pressure or stress. Low scorers feel more poised, confident, and clear-thinking when stressed.

Know[3.1-07] Values Clarification

Anytime you live against your beliefs it makes you sick as hell.

--Allan, AA Member

Your core values are the compass you need to navigate through life. Without a solid grasp of what is important to you, it is easy to lose your way. Lacking awareness of your values can keep you in an unhappy lifestyle or unfulfilling job. Once you know what your values are, you can live a better, more honest, authentic life. I have included 2 methods of Values Clarification.

Values Clarification Method 1:[36]

1. Browse through the Values List of words that follow. On a separate sheet, write down 20 to 25 words that resonate with you. These will be the attributes that you desire or value in yourself. If you think of a word that is not on the list, but applies to you, use it.

Values List

Ability
Abundance
Acceptance
Accomplishment
Achievement
Adaptability
Adventure
Affection
Affluence
Alertness
Ambition
Anticipation
Appreciation
Approachability
Artfulness
Assertiveness
Assurance
Attentiveness
Audacity
Availability
Awareness
Awe
Balance
Beauty
Being-ness
Belongingness
Benevolence
Blissfulness
Boldness
Bravery
Brilliance
Briskness
Buoyancy
Calmness
Camaraderie
Candor
Capability
Care
Carefulness
Certainty
Challenge
Charity
Charm
Chastity
Cheerfulness
Clarity
Classy
Cleanliness
Cleverness
Closeness
Cognizance
Comfort
Commitment
Compassion

---

[36] The values list is a generic list found on the web, the method is from: https://www.taproot.com/live-your-core-values-exercise-to-increase-your-success/

Competence
Complacency
Completion
Composure
Concentration
Confidence
Conformity
Congruency
Connection
Consciousness
Consistency
Contentment
Continuity
Contribution
Control
Conviction
Conviviality
Coolness
Cooperation
Copiousness
Cordiality
Correctness
Courage
Courtesy
Craftiness
Creativity
Credibility
Cunning
Curiosity
Daring
Decisiveness
Decorum
Deepness
Deference
Delicacy
Delight
Dependability
Depth
Desire
Determination
Devotion
Devoutness
Dexterity
Dignity
Diligence
Diplomacy
Direction
Directness
Discernment
Discipline
Discovery
Discretion
Distinction
Diversity
Dreaming
Drive
Duty
Dynamism
Eagerness
Economy
Ecstasy
Education
Effectiveness
Efficiency
Elation
Elegance
Empathy
Encouragement
Endurance
Energy
Enjoyment
Enlightenment
Entertainment
Enthusiasm
Exactness
Excellence
Excitement
Exhilaration
Expectancy
Expediency
Experience
Expertise
Exploration
Expressiveness
Extravagance
Extroversion
Exuberance
Evolution
Facilitating
Fairness
Faith
Fame
Fascination
Fashion
Fearlessness
Fidelity

3.1 Being

Fineness
Finesse
Firmness
Fitness
Flexibility
Flow
Fluency
Fluidity
Focus
Fortitude
Frankness
Freedom
Friendliness
Frugality
Fun
Gallantry
Generosity
Gentility
Genuineness
Giving
Grace
Gratefulness
Gratitude
Gregariousness
Growth
Guidance
Happiness
Harmony
Health
Heart
Helpfulness
Heroism
Holiness
Honesty
Honor
Hopefulness
Hospitality
Humility
Humor
Hygiene
Imagination
Impact
Impartiality
Impeccability
Independence
Industry
Ingenuity
Inquisitiveness
Insightfulness
Inspiration
Instinctiveness
Integrity
Intelligence
Intensity
Intimacy
Intrepidness
Introversion
Intuition
Intuitiveness
Inventiveness
Joy
Judiciousness
Justice
Keenness
Kindness
Knowledgeableness
Lavishness
Leadership
Learning
Liberation
Liberty
Liveliness
Logic
Longevity
Love
Loyalty
Majesty
Mastery
Maturity
Meekness
Mellowness
Meticulousness
Mindfulness
Moderation
Modesty
Motivation
Mysteriousness
Neatness
Nerve
Obedience
Open-mindedness
Openness
Optimism
Opulence
Order
Organization

Originality
Outlandishness
Outrageousness
Passion
Peacefulness
Perceptiveness
Perfection
Perseverance
Persistence
Persuasiveness
Philanthropy
Piety
Playfulness
Pleasantness
Pleasure
Plentiful-ness
Poise
Polish
Popularity
Potency
Practicality
Pragmatism
Precision
Preeminence
Preparedness
Presence
Privacy
Proactivity
Proficiency
Professionalism
Prosperity
Prudence
Punctuality
Purity
Qualification
Quietness
Quickness
Realism
Readiness
Reason
Recognition
Recreation
Refinement
Reflection
Relaxation
Reliability
Resilience
Resolution
Resolve
Resourcefulness
Respect
Restfulness
Restraint
Reverence
Richness
Rigor
Sacredness
Sacrifice
Sagacity
Saintliness
Sanguinity
Satisfaction
Security
Self-control
Selflessness
Self-realization
Self-reliance
Sensitivity
Sensuality
Serenity
Service
Sexuality
Sharing
Shrewdness
Significance
Silence
Silliness
Simplicity
Sincerity
Skillfulness
Smartness
Sophistication
Solidarity
Solidity
Solitude
Soundness
Speed
Spirit
Spirituality
Spontaneity
Stability
Stillness
Strength
Structure
Substantiality
Success

Sufficiency
Support
Supremacy
Superior
Superb
Surprise
Sympathy
Synergy
Tactfulness
Teamwork
Temperance
Thankfulness
Thoroughness
Thoughtfulness
Thrift
Timeliness
Traditionalism
Tranquility
Transcendence
Trust
Trustworthiness
Truth
Understanding
Uniqueness
Unity
Usefulness
Utility
Valor
Variety
Victory
Vigor
Virtue
Vision
Vitality
Vivacity
Warmth
Watchfulness
Wealth
Wholesomeness
Willingness
Winning
Wisdom
Wittiness
Wonder
Worthiness
Zeal
Zest
Zing

2. When you have your list, arrange the words in related groups. These groups only need to make sense to you, but they will "ring true". Try to keep the number of groups to five or fewer. For example:

Group 1: acceptance, harmony, humility
Group 2: drive, education, sophistication, vision
Group 3: honesty, truth, understanding, wisdom
Group 4: peacefulness, relaxation, serenity, tranquility
Group 5: flow, mindfulness, self-realization, thoughtfulness

3. Now choose a word from each group (or another word) that summarizes the gist or meaning of each group for you. Continuing the example:

Group 1: harmony
Group 2: vision
Group 3: wisdom
Group 4: serenity
Group 5: self-realization

4. Use your values words to construct sentences or short phrases. These create actionable statements to guide you in your decisions.

Live in harmony.
Reach my vision through education and drive.
Wisdom is truth, honesty, and understanding.
A balanced life brings serenity.
I must work for self-realization.

5. Sort these phrases to match your priorities:

Live in harmony.
Reach my vision through education and drive.
I must work for self-realization.
Wisdom is truth, honesty, and understanding.
A balanced life brings serenity.

With your values plainly stated and prioritized, write them down and review them often. Keeping your core values in mind will guide you in nearly every decision you make. Review your core values often and do not be afraid to fine-tune them as you get to know yourself and your needs better.

6. There is one last step I added that has helped me immensely. Take the top 3 phrases and find practical activities you can do every day in support of them. Make these actions specific and personal, tailored to your situation. Translating your highest values into action is not only a great motivator but enables real progress. Keep up with these actions every day. This builds good habits and is the seed from which you build your daily routine.

For example, these action statements support the first three value phrases:

Live in harmony: Spend time with my family.
Reach my vision: Do school assignments promptly.
I must work for self-realization: Meditate every day.

Working daily on your top 3 priorities (I call them My First 3 Things, My 3 Things, or 'M3T') gives you a sense of moving forward. Forming the habit is just as important as the work itself. If you feel lazy or put things off sometimes (this is normal), acknowledge it and do a "short version," if possible. But it is important to do something every day.

Know[3.1-08] Values Clarification Method 2:

The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths[37] is a development in the field of positive psychology that is designed to assist an individual in finding and developing their own unique character strengths. It is important to note that every person has every strength in some measure, but each person has some key strengths that are more developed.

Although online quizzes[38] are available to determine your personal strengths, it is also possible for you to self-evaluate[39] through reflection and careful consideration.

There are 24 character strengths, clustered around 6 virtues.[40] What is interesting, considering the monomyth and perennial philosophy aspects of the 12 Steps to a Good Life, is the historical data that went into the study:

---

[37] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Values_in_Action_Inventory_of_ Strengths
[38] https://www.viacharacter.org
[39] Laurie Santos, https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being
[40] Christopher Peterson, Martin Seligman, 2004, "Character Strengths and Virtues"

The book outlines the results of a 3-year project led by Peterson and Seligman involving 55 distinguished social scientists. From Aristotle and Plato to the major world religions, to other great thinkers and philosophers spanning the last 2,500 years, this work represents the most significant effort in history to review, assemble, research, and classify positive strengths/traits in human beings. The result is a 'common language' (scientifically speaking, a 'consensual nomenclature') for understanding and discussing these core capacities in human beings.

The six virtues and their associated strengths are:[41]

1. Wisdom and Knowledge: acquiring and using knowledge
Creativity [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things
Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; exploring and discovering
Open-mindedness [judgment, critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; changing one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly
Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, related to curiosity but goes beyond it to add knowledge systematically

2. Perspective [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having viewpoints that make sense to oneself and to other people
Courage - emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
Bravery [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right; acting on convictions; includes physical bravery
Persistence [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persistence in spite of obstacles; taking pleasure in completing tasks
Integrity [authenticity, honesty]: Speaking the truth, genuine, sincere; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions
Vitality [zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; living life as an adventure; feeling alive

3. Humanity: interpersonal strengths that involve befriending others
Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people
Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds; helping and taking care of them
Social intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; fitting into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

4. Justice: civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
Citizenship [social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork]: Working well as a member of a group or team; loyalty to the group; doing one's share
Fairness: Treating all people the same; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance
Leadership: Encouraging others to get things done while maintaining good relations within the group; organizing and managing group activities

---

41 Peterson, Seligman, 2004, "Character Strengths and Virtues", p29-30

5. Temperance: strengths that protect against excess
Forgiveness and mercy : Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
Humility / Modesty : Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
Self-regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

6. Transcendence: strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
Appreciation of beauty and excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience
Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
Humor [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
Spirituality [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

To use this list, read carefully through the descriptions and write down those virtues and strengths that resonate with you. Continue the exercise by following steps 3 through 6 from Method 1 of the Values Clarification self-assessment.

Know[3.1-09] Time Tracking (Free-Time Tracker)

This is an example you can easily recreate for yourself on paper. Use times that fit your schedule. Track how you spend your free time. In a week or two, you can easily see if you are spending your time furthering your goals or wasting your time with useless distractions.

07:00 ____

08:00 ____

09:00 ____

10:00 ____

11:00 ____

12:00 ____

13:00 ____

14:00 ____

15:00 ____

16:00 ____

17:00 ____

18:00 ____

19:00 ____

20:00 ____

21:00 ____

22:00 ____

23:00 ____

00:00 ____

01:00 ____

Know[3.1-10] Life Overview

The "Life Overview" is an exercise that displays up to 25 years of your life by increments of months. The idea is to fill in major blocks of time in your life to show accomplishments, relationships, experiences, and your plans for the future. It illustrates the finite time you have available to do something important with your life.

Age	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Know[3.1-11] Powerlessness and Unmanageable Items[42]

On a piece of paper, make lines or columns for date, time, and people, places, and things that are unmanageable or you are powerless over. As you go about your daily activities, keep these in mind and keep your piece of paper at hand.

Fill in the blanks as situations come up. Do not wait until the end of the day. This tool is best used right when you feel it - use it as a tool to document your anger, disappointment, fear, frustration, sadness, and other emotions and events over which you are powerless.

In the beginning, you may have dozens of entries. Be patient and vigilant. This simple exercise goes a long way to focusing your energies on the things you can do something about.

Example Entry:

Date:__________ Time:___________
Person, Place, Situation beyond my control: ___________________
Makes me feel:____
____
____

Date:__________ Time:___________
Person, Place, Situation beyond my control: ___________________
Makes me feel:____
____
____

Date:__________ Time:___________
Person, Place, Situation beyond my control: ___________________
Makes me feel:____
____
____

Date:__________ Time:___________
Person, Place, Situation beyond my control: ___________________
Makes me feel:____
____
____

Date:__________ Time:___________
Person, Place, Situation beyond my control: ___________________
Makes me feel:____
____
____

---

[42] Adapted from a set of recovery worksheets, source unknown.

Know[3.1-12] Applied Mindfulness Process Scale[43]

The Applied Mindfulness Process Scale is a snapshot of how well your mindfulness practice helps you deal with problems in your daily life. It is also a reminder of how useful mindfulness is as an on-going asset for living.

For each of the following statements, indicate how often you have used mindfulness in the last 7 days:

0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Almost Always

I used mindfulness practice to…

__Observe my thoughts in a detached manner

__Relax my body when I am tense

__See that my thoughts are not necessarily true

__Enjoy the little things in life more fully

__Calm my emotions when I am upset

__Stop reacting to my negative impulses

__See the positive side of difficult circumstances

__Reduce tensions when I am stressed

__Realize that I can grow stronger from difficult circumstances

__Stop my unhelpful reactions to situations

__Be aware of and appreciate pleasant events

__Let go of unpleasant thoughts and feelings

__Realize that my thoughts are not facts

__Notice pleasant things in the face of difficult circumstances

__See alternate views of a situation

Instructions for scoring: Sum all 15 items for your score of 0 - 60.

What your score means:[44]

A high score (closer to 60) indicates strong mindfulness skills, helping you manage stress, emotions, and challenges effectively. You regularly use mindfulness to stay present, regulate emotions, and reframe difficulties.

A low score (closer to 0) means mindfulness is not a regular tool for you. If stress, negative emotions, or impulsive reactions are common struggles, consider incorporating mindfulness practices, such as mindful breathing or observation, to improve emotional balance and resilience.

---

43 Li, M. J., Black, D. S., Garland, E. L., 2016, "The Applied Mindfulness Process Scale"

44 These are my interpretations and general instructions for the exercise.

Self-Inventory (Step 4)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Self-inventory should not be overly difficult or traumatic. If you experience negative effects during your self-inventory, stop immediately and seek professional help. Do not attempt the self-inventory (Step 4) until you have thoroughly completed Steps 1 through Step 3.

You are not limited to the methods of self-inventory I provide. There are many ways to achieve the same end. This guide is derived from a variety of sources,[45] including my own Step work. Before continuing, read 2.4 Step 4. There are two self-inventories, the Long Format, and the Super Short format. Both are excellent. If you use the short format, read through the long format so you understand the inventory process. The long format is much more thorough and complete. Use the one that works best for you.

Always begin your inventory work with prayer.[46] Here is a good example:

Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

--Psalm 139:23,24

Long Self-Inventory Format (Step 4)

(An alternative format is the Super Simple Step 4, p. 190.)

The most straightforward way to do your long self-inventory is in the form of a story -- your story. Viewing personal events as a narrative can be transformational.[47] It allows you to see the complex cycles of your life and reframe your personal history.[48]

You are looking for those positive and negative traits within you that make your life (and the world) better or worse. Negative traits show up as problems in your life. You are looking for those events or persons that caused you shame, anger, resentment, and fear. You are also looking for the good in yourself, those things about you, your values, or your actions, that made you and the world better. Examples of positive traits are when you persisted in the face of difficulty, bounced back from adversity, or helped someone in need.

---

[45] In recovery, many Step 4 inventories are printable worksheets. Some are more complicated than taxes. Others are copyrighted. A pdf from a now-defunct website (royy.com) says, regarding Step 4 worksheets: "These worksheets are not officially produced or approved by Alcoholics Anonymous. They have been circulating unofficially among AA members for at least 50 years in various versions. Their origin is unknown to the producer of this version." I also leaned heavily on Step 4 chapters from these books: AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous" and "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions"; Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Richard Fowler, Dr. Frank Minirth, and Dr. Paul Meier, "The Path to Serenity"; Melody Beattie, "Codependent's Guide to the Twelve Steps" and other sources.

[46] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Richard Fowler, et al, 1992, "The Path to Serenity", p86

[47] Bruce Feiler, 2021, "Life is in the Transitions", Blinkist Summary

[48] Psychology Today, "Why You Might Not Know Yourself As Well As You Think", http://psychologytoday.com

Look also for major events that impacted your life. These can be anything from social events to physical illness or the loss of a loved one. If it affects you, add it to your inventory. Dig deep. Be thorough. Later, you can use the same narrative format to explore specific issues, such as your work history or relationships. You can do a long self-inventory on nearly any subject.

Start with a blank piece of paper or an open document on your computer. Although editing and security is easier on a computer, there is a certain satisfaction in writing out your inventory by hand. You can use either method or a combination of both.

Long Self-Inventory Overview

The Long Self-Inventory Format consists of listing significant events of your life and then honestly and fearlessly exploring the details surrounding them. You will get a new perspective on life. You will find insight into cycles of behavior you may never have suspected. It takes great courage and perseverance to look deeply into yourself. The rewards are worth the effort.

How to Begin Your Inventory

You can start your inventory chronologically, going forward or backward between the present and childhood. Or you may list the most pressing events first. Begin by beginning. Choose the first event that comes to mind. It can be about a person, place, thing, how you thought about something, how you felt, something you did, or something you said. It can be positive or negative.

How do you know what is significant? If it is a recurring memory, thought, or feeling, it is significant enough to include in your inventory. Nothing is too trivial if it is important to you. The criterion for defining a significant event is simple: does the subject *inform you*, or does it *affect you*?[49] Statements like "2 + 2 = 4" or "It is now 7pm" inform you. But statements like "You're an idiot!" or "I want a divorce," affect you. They cause emotional reactions. Certainly, not all emotional reactions indicate significant events, but all significant events contain an emotional reaction. That is your key.

List Events

When you think of a significant event, make a short statement describing it. Write what happened, when it happened, and how you felt or what you did. For example:

1. When I was 23 I was jealous and broke up with Sylvia.
2. Yesterday I was angry because Jerry missed his deadline.
3. In 2015 I shoplifted because I was bored and depressed.
4. When I was 15 I volunteered at the animal shelter.
5. In fifth grade Mrs. Jones embarrassed me in class.
6. Dad always made me feel stupid and worthless.
7. When I was 10 me and some kids threw rocks at a stray dog.
8. Two years ago I got fired and now I feel insecure all the time.
9. I get jealous when our neighbor flirts with Terry.
10. Last month at work I helped the sales team get caught up.

---

[49] Reference to: Ken Wilber, 1993, "The Spectrum of Consciousness", Chap 10

Notice these statements are out of order, and out of context for anyone but the person who wrote them. Each is a bare-bones statement of a single event. You are writing your story for yourself and no one else. You can reorder the statements and add details later. You do not have to complete the entire list (your life story) all at once. You may want to list a few, and then go on to the next step (Get the Facts), or you can immediately perform that step for each item as you write.

Get the Facts

After identifying a significant event, you want to gather and understand the facts of it. There are many ways to do this. For example, was it part of a dysfunctional childhood? Is it a resentment or grudge against someone? Are you carrying guilt about something? These are the details about events that only you can know and understand. To make the process as simple and painless as possible, categories of traits, emotions, and situations are provided through which you may examine each event.

The categories are like lenses to look at your life events. They are not all-inclusive but give you a working set of tools. Except for the "Look for the Good" category, I believe nearly every significant negative life event is correlated with at least one of these categories.

I found that doing self-inventories is like peeling the layers of an onion, there is always another layer beneath. So, these categories begin with the basics I learned in recovery. Then I included those I experienced myself or learned from others. As you continue your journey, add your own categories.

For each event in your inventory, read through the categories below. When you find something that fits an event as a cause, condition, reaction, or effect, make note of it with that event. This is not easy. Be kind to yourself. Maintain objectivity when searching out the facts. The examples are continued at the end of the list of categories.

Look for the Good[50]

It is important to remember that an inventory is not a condemnation of yourself as a person. You must provide a balanced perspective. The truth is that no person, including yourself, is all good or all bad. That is why looking for the good in yourself comes first. There is no quota or ratio for positive to negative traits (although I like to suggest at least 1 in 5, or 20% good stuff). But always look for the good. Here is how to do that:

List your good points, skills, and talents. Are you mechanically inclined? A problem solver? Good at math? Helpful to others? A team builder? Regardless of your past or current issues, you are good at something and you have goodness within you.

Consider the positive traits you learned from negative events. These may be coping skills, resilience, mental toughness, and others. What I found is that a defect or obstacle in one set of circumstances may be beneficial in another.

---

[50] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Richard Fowler, et al, 1992, "The Path to Serenity", p106

Ask yourself this question, "What are the best things about the worst things that ever happened to me?"[51]

Make a list of your positive traits. Write down at least 10 positive things about yourself. Find events where you used those traits to help someone or make yourself and the world better.

Five Categories from Recovery

The next five categories are directly based on the Step 4 inventory from Alcoholics Anonymous.[52] Use them to identify fundamental problems.

1. Resentment/Anger

Resentment and anger may be included together, but they are not synonymous.[53] Although most angry outbursts are ill-advised, anger can be useful and warranted.

Resentment, however, is long-term and obsessive dwelling on past events. It weighs on your mind and eats away at you. It can be triggered by circumstances, thoughts, or memories. Resentment makes you feel mean. It drains energy and sucks the joy from life.

Consider resentments and anger in relation to people, institutions, and principles.[54] You may resent family and friends, but you can also resent political figures, bureaucratic rules, society, or God.

Here are additional (and often unsuspected) categories of resentments:

People: Father, Mother, Lovers, Brothers, Sisters, Employers, Acquaintances, Aunts, Uncles, Best Friends, Childhood Friends, Clergy, Co-Workers, Cousins, Creditors, Doctors, Employees, Spouses, In-Laws, Judges, Lawyers, Politicians, Life-long Friends, Parole/Probation Officers, Police, School Friends, Teachers, Ex-Spouses/Partners/Lovers, Celebrities, Billionaires, Actors, Celebrities, TV/Movie/YouTube Stars

Institutions: Authority, Bible, Child Protection, Church, Correctional System, Education System, Government, Law, Marriage, Health/Mental Health System, Nationality, Philosophy, Races, Religion, Society

Principles: Adultery, Death, God/Deity, Golden Rule, Heaven, Hell, Homophobia, Race/Racism, Religion, Jesus Christ, Life After Death, Original Sin, Retribution, Satan, Sin, Ten Commandments, Rules, Morality

2. Fear

Fear has many forms, such as anxiety, terror, apprehension, agitation, and nervousness. It causes you to avoid, procrastinate, stall, freeze up, find distraction, fight, or run away. Sometimes fear triggers anger. Fear blocks spontaneity and limits freedom.

---

[51] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e51VsG0dlTo

[52] AA World Services, Inc, 2001, "Alcoholics Anonymous Fourth Edition", p64-70

[53] https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-anger-and-vs-resentment/

[54] AA World Services, Inc, 2001, "Alcoholics Anonymous Fourth Edition", p64

You may have ingrained and unknown fears not immediately apparent. You can be afraid of something and not even be aware of it, because you hide it from yourself or cover it up with anger. Here are some examples:

Peoples' opinions, gossip, loss of reputation
Financial insecurity, loss, debt, poverty, feeling worthless
Rejection, abandonment, loneliness
Physical pain, injury, illness, abuse, death
Emotional pain, being bullied, belittled, made fun of
Not being able to control or change a person or situation
Being inferior, inadequate, weak
Criticism, exposure, embarrassment
Expressing ideas or feelings
Getting trapped, loss of freedom, loss of choice

3. Sex

In chapter 1.2 A Good Life, I said that sex may be "the most complex subject in human experience." Because of that complexity, it is often difficult to untangle your emotions and behavior for inventory purposes. The best approach to sexual inventory I found is to look at your intent and behavior in each situation.[55] Concerning your past sexual conduct, ask yourself these questions:

Was I selfish?
Was I dishonest?
Was I inconsiderate?
Did I cheat or betray a trust?
Did I hurt someone emotionally, physically, or mentally?
Did I make someone jealous or suspicious?
Did I cause someone to be bitter?

4. Self-Centeredness

Self-centeredness is often based on fear and pride. Because it stems from ego, egregious behavior may be rationalized as justifiable. Examples of self-centeredness are given below.

Selfishness (Selfish Desires):

Not seeing others point of view, problems or needs
Wanting things my way
Wanting special treatment
Wanting others to meet my needs, dependence
Wanting what others have
Wanting to control, dominance
Thinking I'm better, grandiosity
Wanting to be the best
Thinking others are jealous
Wanting others to be like me
Being miserly, possessive

---

[55] Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc, 2001, "Alcoholics Anonymous Fourth Edition", p69

Wanting more than my share
Reacting from self-loathing, self-righteousness
Too concerned about me
Not trying to be a friend
Wanting to look good or be liked
Concerned only with my needs

Dishonesty (Selfish Thinking):

Not seeing or admitting where I was at fault
Having a superior attitude–thinking I'm better
Blaming others for my problems
Not admitting I've done the same thing
Not expressing feelings or ideas
Not being clear about motives
Lying, cheating, stealing
Hiding reality–not facing facts
Stubbornly holding on to inaccurate beliefs
Breaking rules
Lying to myself
Exaggerating, minimalizing
Setting myself up to be "wronged"
Expecting others to be what they are not
Being perfectionistic

Self-seeking (Selfish Actions):

Manipulating others to do my will
Putting others down internally or externally to build me up
Engaging in character assassination
Acting superior
Acting to fill a void
Engaging in gluttony or lusting at the expense of another person
Ignoring others' needs
Trying to control others
Getting revenge when I don't get what I want
Holding a resentment
Acting to make me feel good

5. Affects my…

Determining how a problem affects you helps you figure out the motivations and characteristics that cause it. Many of your reactions are your ego trying to fill your needs. You have a personal stake in the issue.

Using the list below,[56] write how this issue affected you or motivated your thoughts and behavior. You do not have to use everything in the list. Use only those that apply to your situation.

Self-esteem: how you think of yourself
Pride: how you think others think of you
Worldview: how you think of the world; your comfort zone

---

[56] I made slight edits to a widely available list.

Ambitions: your desires, goals, and plans; how things should be
Security: including physical, emotional, and financial security
Personal Relations: relationships with people (and loved pets)
Control: of your life, situations, and other people
Healthy Sex Relations: the desire for healthy sexual intimacy
Finances: your money, possessions, property, job, career

Four Categories of Motivation and Behavior

The next four categories relate to a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of your motivations and behavior. If you have difficulty, discuss these with a mental health professional.

1. Guilt

A powerful and potentially toxic emotion,[57] guilt is so uncomfortable a person may go to great lengths to avoid it,[58] including repression, projection, and self-harm. Guilt occurs when you believe you have violated your own or a universal code of ethics.[59] You have done something wrong and feel responsible. It is closely related to remorse, regret, and shame.

Guilt is an internal conflict concerning something you believe you did, but should not have, or something you did not do, but should have.[60] The problem with guilt is that it always concerns events in the past that cannot be changed. What is done cannot be undone.

People often feel guilty about situations over which they had little or no control. This is called "false guilt". Survival guilt is an example of this.[61] Another example is feeling guilty when a friend or family member makes poor decisions and suffers the consequences.

Another kind of guilt is "authentic" guilt.[62] This is when you know you are responsible for harm. Your action, or inaction, hurt another person, living thing, or caused harm in the world.

It is important to determine, for inventory purposes, if your guilt is false guilt, authentic guilt, or lies somewhere between the two. When considering guilt, remember that no human being goes through life without making mistakes or hurting someone else. You must identify your feelings of guilt before you can begin to heal.

2. Payoff

The idea of payoffs may be difficult to grasp initially. But once you recognize it, you will see it in everything you do. Defined as "the benefit gained as the result of a previous action",[63] I would add that it may also be a benefit gained by refraining from action.

---

[57] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Richard Fowler, et al, 1992, "The Path to Serenity", p105
[58] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilt_(emotion)#Defenses
[59] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilt_(emotion)
[60] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilt_(emotion)#Psychology
[61] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivor_guilt
[62] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Richard Fowler, et al, 1992, "The Path to Serenity", p105
[63] https://www.thefreedictionary.com/payoff

Here is my rule of thumb: "For everything you do there is a payoff, and for everything you do not do, there is a payoff." In conducting your inventory, your job is to figure out what your payoff is.

A payoff can be simple and obvious, such as getting paid for working. It can be a psychological payoff, such as acceptance, approval, praise, love, or companionship.[64] Or a payoff can be avoidance of negative feelings like rejection, disapproval, or fear. Here are some examples of payoffs:

Procrastination: In college I avoided doing my assignments. It caused me a great deal of stress and anxiety (and failing calculus four times). Despite the misery this behavior caused, putting things off let me temporarily escape my fears. That was my payoff.

Ruminating: Obsessively dwelling on one's problems can lead to depression.[65] But even a negative mental state can have a payoff. In ruminating, misery can be more comfortable than looking for solutions and trying new things.[66]

Social interactions: Many payoffs are found through every-day conversations, often multi-layered, subtle, and cooperative.[67] Consider the payoffs for gossiping, flirting, bragging, and complaining.

Maintaining self-image or worldview: Recall how you react when someone insulted you, your family, your favorite team, or your political party. Your self-image is strongly tied to your ego, and your worldview is linked to your sense of security. You will vigorously defend any attack on either.

Positive Payoffs: Payoffs are not always negative or harmful. Being kind has a payoff because it helps someone or makes the world better.[68] However, engaging in patronizing behavior to demonstrate to someone or yourself that you are superior to them has a negative end result.[69]

The key is to consider your intent. WHY are you doing what you are doing… is it to help the other person, or is it to make yourself feel better? Your intent is a clue to your payoff. Often, you will try to hide your true intent, even from yourself, if it would make you feel bad or look bad to someone else.

Write it down if that helps. List everyone involved, and all of your feelings and the pertinent facts toward each of them. Try mind-mapping it. (See Journaling Methods p. 311) Your objective is to uncover connections or hidden emotions that you were not previously aware of.

For inventory purposes, focus on the payoffs that motivate you toward problematic thinking or behavior. View the payoff in a neutral, clinical manner. It is neither good nor bad, but it is the motivator that causes you to do, or not do, something.

---

[64] https://www.drphil.com/advice/dr-phils-ten-life-laws/

[65] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumination_(psychology)#Pathology

[66] Alice Boyes, PhD., 2018, "The Healthy Mind Toolkit", p40

[67] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Games_People_Play_(book)#Summary

[68] This excellent point from Larry H., AA Member

[69] John Bradshaw, ,1988, “Healing the Shame that Binds You”, p93

3. Negative Behavior Cycles[70]

My life has cycles. Sometimes they have different flavors but it's the same patterns over and over. --Ed, AA Member

Negative behavior cycles are often caused by a desire to avoid emotional pain. Despite knowing the disastrous result of the behavior, the desire to relieve internal stress or shame can be overpowering.

You can be embedded in a negative behavior cycle and not realize it. These cycles are problematic and difficult to stop. Obvious examples are substance abuse, binge eating, and smoking. Other behavior cycles can be more difficult to see and understand, such as those that operate in family and intimate relationships. (For inventory purposes, list positive behavior cycles, such as good habits, under "Look for the Good".)

Behavior cycles consist of:

1. an event that acts as a trigger
2. thoughts and feelings that are your reaction to the event
3. your behavior that results from your thoughts and feelings
4. the reward (or "payoff") for your behavior
5. a return to normal until the next triggering event

As you list events in your inventory, you will notice that many of them are recurring. The places, people, or other details may differ, but your reaction, behavior, and the outcomes are the same. This is a behavior cycle in action. Look closely at circumstances in which you were angry, depressed, or drank, drugged, or had sex to excess, avoided problems, overspent, procrastinated, manipulated or were manipulated by others, and so on.

Uncovering your negative behavior cycles can be a shock. You will wonder how you could have repeated the same mistakes over and over. You may be disappointed in yourself. Do not let this discourage you; continue with your inventory. Discovering your behavior cycles helps you clarify your intentions and focus your energy on living a good life.

4. Cognitive Errors

In Part 1: Foundation, I explained how our thoughts are often misaligned with reality. Cognitive errors are thoughts you have that you think are true but are not. They cause great pain. Awareness of your thinking errors is a major step toward finding happiness and improving your relationships. Cognitive errors are discussed at length in Mind.

---

70 Information from these websites: https://motivationsgame.wordpress.com/2014/11/24/the-behavioral-cycle/; https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-self-destructive-behavior/201512/understanding-self-destructive-dysregulated-behaviors; also, John Bradshaw, “Healing the Shame that Binds You”, 1988, discusses shame-based behavior cycles at length

Five Very Serious Categories

The final five categories are issues for which, depending on their degree, you may need professional help. Ironically, people experiencing these issues are often the last to recognize them. They are complex and multi-faceted. They nearly always overlap, or cause, other problems.

1. Addiction and Dependence

Addiction is often defined as "a neuropsychological disorder characterized by a persistent and intense urge to use a drug, despite substantial harm and other negative consequences."[71] Closely related is psychological dependence, which is "a cognitive disorder that involves emotional–motivational withdrawal symptoms… upon cessation of prolonged drug abuse or certain repetitive behaviors."[72]

For this discussion, I am using addiction and dependence to describe substances, thoughts, emotions, or behaviors you use for short term mood-altering effects, but that may have long-term harmful consequences to yourself or others. You tend to increase the behavior to maintain the temporary effect, while experiencing physical and/or psychological withdrawal if you cannot engage in the behavior.[73]

You can become addicted to almost anything,[74] including,[75] drugs (legal and illegal), alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, your phone, food (high in carbs, fats, or sugar), shopping, gambling, being sick, plastic surgery, getting tattoos, tanning, exercise, social media, sex, porn, toxic relationships, self-criticism, perfectionism, pessimism, anger, depression, helplessness, lying, chaos, collecting, and many others.

For your inventory, look at substances, thoughts, and behaviors that cause problems when you engage in them, or discomfort when you do not. Pay closest attention to those that may cause harm to you or someone else.

2. Mental or Psychiatric Disorders[76]

Moods and behaviors that cause serious problems and are beyond your control must be addressed by mental health professionals. And yet, unless you are referred by an outside agency (such as the legal system or family), you may deny or be unaware that you need help. For example, I was once so depressed that I was, in the words of a therapist, "off the scale". But if someone had asked me if I felt depressed, I would have answered in the negative. My perceptions were that existence itself was a bleak and terrifying state, and I was only doing my best to survive it.

---

[71] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Addiction

[72] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_dependence

[73] https://www.bbc.com/news/health-15723834

[74] https://www.bbc.com/news/health-15723834

[75] https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/addiction/ss/slideshow-surprising-addictions; https://drugabuse.com/blog/are-these-7-things-really-as-addictive-as-drugs/; https://www.thehealthy.com/mental-health/surprising-addictions/; https://www.addictioncenter.com/ addiction/10-most-common-addictions

[76] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_disorder

It can be difficult to differentiate, for yourself, between common negative traits, such as anger, fear, and sadness, and more serious conditions.

3. Dysfunction

No self-inventory is complete without considering the damage that a person may suffer as a child in a dysfunctional family. An abused child has no physical or emotional defense against those on whom they are dependent for love and security. Abuse is "any childhood situation that blocked or limited… receiving love from one or both parents…"[77]

> *We all come from dysfunctional families, it's just a matter of degree.*
>
> --Faith, AA Member

Dysfunction in families is multi-generational and cyclic in nature.[78] Rather than thinking of dysfunction in terms of cause and effect, it is more accurate to think of the dysfunctional family as a closed, dynamic system. Each family is unique and defines the rules and the roles of its members. This does not excuse abusive behavior but is a more beneficial way to examine its results. Think less in terms of blame and more along the lines of how your family background affected your worldview, self-image, and emotional responses.

4. Trauma

Trauma is an emotional response to a distressing event, such as violence, accident, or natural disaster.[79] It can also be passed down in families.[80] The experiences of your parents affected how they treated you, just as your grandparents' experiences shaped how they treated your parents. Traumatic Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can significantly affect a person's physical and mental health later in life.[81] Trauma is preverbal, meaning the brain has difficulty processing thoughts and feelings about the experience.[82] You will probably need professional help to deal with traumatic experiences.

5. Harm Caused

Harm Caused is any harm or injury you caused, even to yourself. Harm can include neglect, physical injury, verbal or emotional abuse, intimidation, lack of care, withholding affection, addiction, and many other things. Harm is not always malicious or intended. You can cause harm indirectly by selfish or self-serving behaviors. Harm Caused is an action (or lack of action) on your part that injured another person, a living thing, or made the world worse.

Inventory Examples Continued

Now we can take another look at some of the examples previously discussed under "List Events". When you apply the categories as explained above, you see the inventory begin to take shape:

---

[77] Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Richard Fowler, et al, 1992, "The Path to Serenity", p91
[78] John Bradshaw, "Bradshaw: On the Family", 1988, p23,61
[79] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_trauma
[80] Mark Wolynn, "It Didn't Start with You", 2017, Blinkist Summary
[81] Donna Jackson Nakazawa, "Childhood Disrupted:, 2016, Blinkist Summary
[82] Bessel van der Kolk, MD, 2015, "The Body Keeps the Score", p73

When I was 23 I was jealous and broke up with Sylvia.

Resentment: I resented that she talked to other guys all the time
Fear: I was afraid she would dump me for someone else
Guilt: horrible guilt, I was emotionally cruel
Payoff: relieving the insecurity meant more than the relationship
Harm caused: she was really hurt; she loved me
Affected my: self-esteem, pride, control, healthy sex relations
Dysfunction: my parents were unfaithful to each other

Yesterday I was angry because Jerry missed his deadline.

Resentment: he always goofs off and I have to take up the slack
Fear: I'm afraid he's going to get me fired
Payoff: the anger made me feel self-righteous and superior
Harm caused: migraine, high blood pressure, resentment
Affected my: ambitions, security, control, finances
Addiction: I went home and got high to relax

When I was 15 I volunteered at the animal shelter.

Look for the good: I helped take care of animals
Payoff: I love animals / people would know I'm a good person
Affected my: self-esteem, pride, personal relations
Dysfunction: I loved animals more because I felt unloved

In fifth grade Mrs. Jones embarrassed me in class.

Resentment: I am still angry at her for that
Fear: a fear of authority and being the center of attention
Affected my: self-esteem, pride, security, personal relations
Trauma: I'm shy and afraid of crowds since that day

Notice there are usually multiple reactions to the same event. For example, if a situation caused fear, you may have responded with anger and lashed out. So, the reaction(s) are fear, anger, and harm caused. Or you may be nice to someone, but only to manipulate them while making yourself look good.

Review the examples and analyze each event using the inventory categories. There are no wrong answers. Use these fictional scenarios to build a practice inventory. You can list the events as bullet points or write them in full sentences. Practice until you feel confident with the process. Then, turn back to Chapter 2.4 Step 4 and carefully read A Word of Caution.

Now it is time to work on your own self-inventory. Write down every significant event you can think of, then get the facts concerning each one as shown in the examples. Use the categories provided or create your own as you gain experience and knowledge.

Recalling these incidents can be emotionally exhausting. It may take considerable time to finish. I have seen people spend days or weeks on a self-inventory. Try to be as objective as possible. Take your time, but do not let procrastination stall your efforts.

Know[3.1-13] Super Simple Self-Inventory (Step 4)

This is a modified Step 4 inventory format. It is very close to the one I used for my first Step 4, and includes all the basics. You can change it for your own use. Keep in mind, it is not as complete or thorough as the Long Inventory Format, but it is simpler and easier to understand. It is a good format to use for getting to the root of issues that are bothering you.

Read the long inventory format thoroughly to understand what each of the entries require.

Do not forget to look for the good. Make at least 20% of your inventory (1 out of 5 entries) things you did well, personal strengths, or how you made the world better.

Person or Event:

Fundamental Problem:

_____Resentment / Anger
_____Fear
_____Sex / Intimacy
_____Selfishness
_____Dishonesty

Affects My:

_____Self-esteem: how you think of yourself
_____Pride: how you think others think of you
_____Worldview: how you think of the world; your comfort zone
_____Ambitions: your desires, goals, and plans; how things should be
_____Security: including physical, emotional, and financial security
_____Personal Relations: relationships with people (and loved pets)
_____Control: of your life, situations, and other people
_____Healthy Sex Relations: the desire for healthy sexual intimacy
_____Finances: your money, possessions, property, job, career

For everything you do there is a payoff,
and for everything you do not do, there is a payoff.

What is my payoff:

3.2 Doing

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.

--Ecclesiastes 3

We are what we repeatedly do. --Aristotle

Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance,
but to do what lies clearly at hand. --Thomas Carlyle

Doing Contents

About Doing 191
Truths About Doing 193
You 194
Time 219
Tools 231
Engagement 243
Living Virtuously 247

Know[3.2-01] **About Doing**

"Doing" began as a list of practical skills designed to transform any slacker into a powerhouse of productivity, crushing procrastination and ushering in an era of high-intensity personal achievement. But I realized that while productivity skills are effective, they must be applied repeatedly. They do not offer a permanent solution, nor will they, by themselves, lead to a good life. There is no magic bullet.

Now, "Doing" embodies a holistic approach to productivity that goes beyond simply getting more done. It means living a balanced, ethical life where improving yourself makes the world a better place. By helping others and acting with integrity, you find deeper fulfillment and purpose, creating a ripple effect that extends well beyond your own achievements.

However, if you think you are going to change yourself or change your life by trying harder,[1] you are mistaken. If you believe that merely understanding your behavior gives you the power to change your behavior, you are wrong.[2]

---

[1] "Trying harder" is an attempt to assert control over something you may not be able to control and may make you feel more helpless or anxious: Rob Willson and Rhena Branch, 2006, "Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Dummies", p98

[2] Dariusz Kuncewicz, Polish Journal of Applied Psychology vol. 12, 2014, "Why Insight in Psychotherapy Does Not Always Lead to Behaviour Change?"; AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p39: "...the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge."; Insight is most useful when it motivates you to use additional tools to implement change.

That is what you have been taught to believe. It is what 99% of everyone around you believes. These beliefs are wrong, grossly wrong, and they shackle you to a false reality of endless effort with little success.

You can mindlessly do the same things over and over, like Sisyphus pushing his rock:[3] this is the clichéd definition of insanity.[4] Or you can do something utterly different and miraculous. Change is within your grasp through one simple concept. This is about, for the first time, "doing" differently.

Running your life by and for yourself provides, at best, limited results. But linking your actions to a greater good, a Higher Power, vastly multiplies your motivation and effectiveness.[5] Simply put, you do more, better, easier, with meaning, and purpose.

Beyond your small self (your ego) is a Higher Self, and the two are inextricably linked. What you do (and how and why) shapes who you are.[6] Your actions sculpt you into a strong person of integrity and goodness, or they push you into the shapeless dark of regret and despair.

When you start a new task or project, you enter an active mode of "doing". Know your values. Align your actions, through your values, with something greater than yourself. Success is dependent upon using the right tools, at the right time, and working with your Higher Power for a greater purpose. This lesson is fundamental. Nothing else will do. Nothing else works. Without this initial mindset you are doomed to repeating the same efforts, again and again, with no meaningful or lasting results.

While your purpose propels you forward, the journey is not always smooth. As you progress, reconnect with your core values and trust in your Higher Power to keep you on track. Align every action with your purpose.

If you get stuck or bogged down in your endeavors, review your values and goals. You can be paralyzed by fear of failure or fear of success.[7] You may be overwhelmed by the complexity and size of your task. Or perhaps you do not believe in what you are doing.[8] You can make excuses, or you can make progress, but you cannot make both.[9] Ask your Higher Power to help you with every obstacle that stands in your way.

---

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisyphus

[4] "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." A staple of recovery programs, this quote is often misattributed to Einstein. https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/03/23/same/

[5] Zargham Ghapanchi & Seyyed Ehsan Golparvar, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, "Locus of control, Religious Orientation, and L2 Achievement", the study found a positive relationship between religious orientation, internal locus of control (LOC), and academic performance; Janine E. Gautheir, M.A "Spirituality, Health Locus of Control, and Wellness in Organizational Health Promotion and Wellness Programs", 2001; These studies suggest correlation between spirituality and behavior.

[6] Gordon Livingston M.D., "Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart", 2004, Chap 2

[7] Glickman, Rosalene, Ph.D., "Optimal Thinking", 2002

[8] https://mfishbein.com/how-to-overcome-procrastination/

[9] https://careynieuwhof.com/4-ways-to-optimize-the-enneagram-other-personality-assessments-and-fuel-your-mission/

When you do something, do it for something greater than yourself:[10]

Improve yourself, to live a good life.
Exercise your body because it is the temple of your soul.
Improve your relationships so you can help others.
Be an honest person for the grace of God.
Live well for your Higher Power.
Do the right thing and make the world better.

The bottom line of Doing is that there is no task or goal too big or small that you cannot ask your Higher Power for help. Say this prayer (or make your own) to help you:

I know I have a purpose, given to me by [You, God, my Higher Power, my God]. I humbly ask your help to be the person I am meant to be. Help me align my actions with [the Tao, your will, my true purpose]. Give me the strength to do that which is right and necessary. Amen.

Know[3.2-02] **Truths About Doing**

If I cannot find Paradise in this short life, then I will bend my will, my habits, and my thoughts until, made new, Paradise and I are one. --TA

1. To make real change, align to a higher good. When you are stuck or making slow progress, read "About Doing".

2. Know what your First 3 Things are. They are determined by your values. Work on them every day. (See Values Clarification p. 166)

3. Three things you think will change your behavior, but rarely do: Self-knowledge, Self-will, Fear of Consequences.[11]

4. Procrastination is caused by: Conflicting values, Fear, Disliking the task, Low energy or motivation, Pain or illness.[12]

5. To become a productive person is a noble goal. But busyness for its own sake robs you of experiences that make life worthwhile.

6. Seek growth before accomplishment. A growth mindset is consistent practice, diligent effort, and right method.[13] Do the right thing at the right time.

7. Determine if your goals are your own, or come from society, family, or peers. Seek your own goals. Find your own path.

8. Your conscious mind rides on the shoulders of an 800-pound gorilla, your unconscious.[14] You can make as many commitments as you want, but nothing changes until that 800-pound gorilla says so.

---

[10] Stephen R. Covey, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People", 1989, "Align Your Paradigms with Universal Principles"

[11] This gem from Leo, AA Member

[12] See Procrastination in this chapter.

[13] https://scottjeffrey.com/change-your-fixed-mindset/

[14] https://www.massagemag.com/healthy-brain-109505/

9. Habits are the foundation of everything you do and are.[15] To live a better life, develop better habits. To be more productive, make productivity a habit. To be happy, habitually do those things that bring you happiness.

10. Effective productivity is more complex than whipping yourself with "should's", "have to's", and "need to's". Until you understand the difference between "should", "want", and "need", you will make little progress.[16]

Know[3.2-03] Five Parts of Doing

There are five interconnected parts of "Doing." It starts with You, your personal attributes, habits, and values. Next, Time is the finite resource you learn to allocate wisely. It is the canvas upon which you paint all of your projects, desires, and achievements. Tools are the systems and techniques used to get things done efficiently. Engagement is where you put everything into action, applying yourself and your tools to make progress. Finally, Living Virtuously ties everything together, guiding you toward a life that is productive, fruitful, and ethically fulfilling.

You

The central figure in anything you do, is of course, you. In order to be productive and effective, it is helpful to carefully consider the assets and qualities that help you move forward.

Know[3.2-04] Values

Understanding your values is essential.[17] Values serve as a guiding compass that directs you toward meaningful goals while keeping you aligned with what truly matters. They provide inspiration and give purpose to your actions. Even setbacks, when viewed constructively, motivate you to realign with your true self. Living authentically by prioritizing your values helps you steer clear of unhelpful habits, and builds your self-esteem and confidence. (See Values Clarification p. 166)

It's only you. The people around you, the things, the settings, all is temporary. Only you are permanent within your world. So it is critical that you honor and treat yourself in the right regard. And that means demanding better for yourself, going through the hardships. You'll get there. These things take time.

--Amber, Intuitive Counselor

I spent most of my life feeling stressed, inadequate, and afraid. I punished myself for not living up to expectations. My accomplishments were chiefly driven by fear. I lived in a self-sabotaging cycle of procrastination and panic. I believe many people suffer with the same problems.

---

[15] https://edugage.com/14-quotes-on-habits-by-aristotle-that-will-increase-your-productivity/

[16] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/inviting-a-monkey-to-tea/201304/stop-shoulding-yourself-to-death

[17] Dr. Clayton Tucker-Ladd, "Psychological Self-Help", 2009, p.113, https://www.psychologicalselfhelp.org

You probably want to increase your willpower, self-discipline, and resilience. Then you can be more productive and change your life for the better. But I believe there are two avenues to success. From the outside, they look remarkably similar: two different people can be motivated, work hard, and never give up. And yet, their motivations could be rooted in completely different mindsets.

People can be motivated by needs of deficiency or growth.[18] Either may lead to outward success, but the subjective experiences are much different. Motivation by deficiency translates to fear and pain. Motivation by growth promotes true resilience and living a good life.

The question is, can a person change their mode of motivation, and if so, how? The answer lies in developing self-compassion. When you look at yourself and your goals through the lens of self-compassion, you accomplish more, and enjoy it more. Self-compassion builds willpower, self-discipline, and resilience without the misery of self-criticism many of us know so well. (See Self-Compassion p. 379)

Know[3.2-05] Give Up on Perfection[19]

Perfectionism is not a gift. It is an intense fear of failure that can paralyze and stupefy. It drains energy and enjoyment from doing what you love. It strikes at your heart and plants the seed of doubt. Perfectionism not only keeps you from doing things well, but it can also keep you from doing anything at all.

An idea that helps me a lot with perfectionism is the Japanese term "wabi-sabi."[20] It is appreciation of beauty that is imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is the realization that perfection does not exist and never will. I think of it as the perfection of imperfection. Seeing myself through the lens of wabi-sabi helps me find the courage and motivation to start and continue difficult tasks.

Know[3.2-06] The Cognitive Triangle[21]

Also known as the CBT Triangle, the Cognitive Triangle is a basic concept in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). It demonstrates the relationship between your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Visualize a triangle where the top angle represents your thoughts, and the bottom right and left angles represent your feelings and behavior. Your thoughts influence your feelings, which influence your actions. In the same way, your behavior influences your thoughts and feelings. For example, negative thoughts can lead to negative emotions, which can lead to negative behavior. By interrupting this cycle at any point, you can break the cycle and bring about positive change. So, by changing your thoughts or managing your emotions better, you can change your behavior. (See Doing p. 191; Mind p. 289; Emotion p. 345)

---

[18] Dr. Clayton Tucker-Ladd, "Psychological Self-Help", p.113, https://www.psychologicalselfhelp.org

[19] Anna O'Brien, "A Life Full of Glitter", 2018, Chap12

[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabi-sabi

[21] https://hudsontherapygroup.com/blog/cognitive-triangle

Know[3.2-07] Self-Regulation Theory[22]

Self-regulation is a multi-step process that enables you to steer your actions toward your goals, with the foundation of this process being the establishment of clear, appropriate goals. There are three steps:

1. Self-monitoring: Begin by taking an honest look at your current behaviors and performance. This involves tracking your thoughts, feelings, and actions in a way that provides a realistic picture of where you stand.

2. Self-evaluation: Next, compare your current actions with what is necessary to achieve your goals. This step requires you to assess whether your efforts align with your objectives, emphasizing the importance of having clear and relevant goals to serve as benchmarks for success.

3. Self-reaction: Finally, evaluate your emotional and cognitive responses to your performance. If you are dissatisfied with your progress or feel that adjustments are needed, this stage is where you decide to change direction. Recognizing the need for modification helps refine your approach, ensuring that your actions remain in step with your well-defined goals.

Together, these steps create a continuous loop of self-improvement, ensuring that your behavior evolves in line with both your aspirations and the realities of your performance.[23]

Grit[24]

Grit is one of those buzzwords people like to use when discussing success and achievement. It sounds good when you talk about it: uplifting, motivating, and empowering. But "grit", as a personality trait, is not always attractive, and it is never easy. It can be a tendency to grind, to push forward, to disregard nonessential concerns. Being driven by grit means you keep going even if you are a sweaty, panting, struggling mess. With grit, achieving the goal becomes the only thing that matters.

A mix of many traits, grit includes commitment, willpower, self-discipline, and others. With persistence, they can be developed over time. Next, I share strategies for developing these traits so you, too, can have "grit".

Know[3.2-08] Commitment

"Commitment" is defined as "the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.… a pledge or undertaking… an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action."[25] When you commit to something, you are making a promise, if only to yourself, that you will fulfill that commitment. Every commitment exacts a price, whether it is in time or money, or some action you do or refrain from doing. Commitment always has a cost.

---

[22] https://positivepsychology.com/self-regulation/

[23] One of the early self-help books I read outlined a similar idea: https://ia803204.us.archive.org/27/items/maxwell-maltz-psycho-cybernetics/Maxwell-Maltz-PsychoCybernetics.pdf

[24] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grit_(personality_trait)

[25] Dictionary via Google

Outside pressures may coerce you into commitments you do not desire. These can be social obligations, education, career choices, or political and religious beliefs. Closely examine any goals you refer to with words and phrases such as "should", "need to", or "have to". These are not true commitments based on your own values and needs.

The first step in making a commitment is acknowledging the burden you are accepting. Commitments have a cost that cannot be paid through sheer emotion or shallow motivational self-talk. Commitment requires character, self-compassion, and the courage to recommit when you come up short.

In "My Story," I discussed trying to change through willpower and self-criticism. When willpower failed, self-criticism was my backup. Such a cycle is common but causes unnecessary suffering. Although a commitment requires willpower, it is not always in the way or amount you think.

Be kind to yourself. If you are self-critical, take a step back and see what is not working. Self-criticism is a signal, not to punish yourself, but to reevaluate your situation.

Five steps to make a commitment:

1. Be sure the goal, action, or task aligns with your values.
2. Carefully consider the costs versus benefits of the commitment you are planning to make.
3. Formulate goals, and the plans to achieve them, that will fulfill your commitment.
4. Create habits to reinforce the actions necessary to support your commitment. Working on a daily routine is a good start.
5. Continuously reevaluate steps 1-4.

Know[3.2-09] Motivation

Motivation is necessary, but not sufficient, to complete tasks and accomplish goals successfully. I learned this lesson early. On a difficult obstacle course in the Army,[26] a fellow soldier was seriously injured in a fall. He was just as motivated as I was, yet a single slip derailed his progress. I learned then that motivation alone is not enough. Accidents and bad luck happen despite motivation. Motivation is an emotion that ebbs and flows like any other.[27]

Keep in mind the transient nature of motivation. Do not rely on motivation alone to accomplish your goals; work on self-discipline and consistency[28] as well. Develop your skills, put in the work, and be prepared. With those minor cautions, here are some ways to create and maintain motivation:

Mind Your Health: Keeping yourself healthy is the number one tip for maintaining motivation. Quick quiz: picture a highly motivated individual. You probably visualized an athlete: a player running onto the field or a fighter entering the ring. In other words, someone in the peak of health.

---

[26] The Darby Queen, US Army Ranger Course,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrtzO7AR0N0,
changed a bit in 45 years but happy to see, still much the same
[27] https://medium.com/coffee-times/motivation-is-overrated-ef4d2b41c058
[28] Ibid.

Motivating yourself is difficult if your sleep and nutrition are insufficient. High motivation comes best from a baseline of good health.[29] Eat well, sleep well, exercise, and minimize stress. (See Body p. 249)

Find a Reason: There are two types of motivation, internal and external.[30] You can be motivated externally (for example, by fear or rewards), or internally (by needs, desires, and values). Internal motivation provides superior results,[31] while external motivation sometimes actually reduces performance.[32] You can find internal motivation for difficult tasks by looking at the big picture: remind yourself what you want, and why. Place each task in the timeline that leads to your goal.

Music: After testing various soundtracks designed to enhance focus, I went old school. I have a playlist of songs I call "Turn It Up!". When I write, do chores, or work out, I play these songs and turn it up. Try it with your favorite high-energy songs. It works!

Coffee:[33] Talk to your doctor before using caffeine. Coffee (and other caffeinated beverages) can be a useful short-term motivator,[34] but it can have serious health consequences.[35] Use it with caution and common sense; it is not a substitute for a good night's sleep.

Support Network: Few things are more motivating than the support of those close to you.[36] You can ask someone, for example, to work out with you. Many people find it easier to exercise with a friend, (but it is OK if you do not). Even verbal support helps to maintain motivation. Once you enlist the support of others, do your best to follow through. Family and friends need to know that you say what you mean and mean what you say. Share the goals you are committed to and have a plan for reaching them.

Focus on Something You Enjoy:[37] Even in distasteful or boring tasks, find something you enjoy. Perhaps you appreciate the camaraderie of your coworkers. Listen to music or audiobooks while you work. Ask for help with tedious or difficult tasks. Use chores at home for time with family.

Willpower and Self-Discipline

The central idea of willpower and self-discipline have been discussed for centuries. They are rooted in the idea of "free will", which is as old as the Greeks and was much debated by early Christianity.[38] These concepts shape our understanding of human behavior on a personal and cultural level. They are generally viewed as traits an individual either possesses or lacks.

---

[29] https://health.selfdecode.com/blog/increase-motivation-lifestyle-natural-approaches/
[30] Shad Helmstetter, Ph.D., "What to Say When You Talk to Yourself", 1982, Chap 19
[31] Johnmarshall Reeve, "Understanding Motivation and Behavior", 7th Ed. 2018, p108
[32] https://www.nirandfar.com/extrinsic-motivation/
[33] Roman Gilperin, "Addiction Procrastination and Laziness", Chap 6
[34] Robin Skeen, "100 Simple Motivators", 2008, Tip#6
[35] https://healthcare.utah.edu/healthfeed/postings/2017/05/caffeine-dangers.php
[36] Robin Skeen, "100 Simple Motivators", 2008, Tip#53
[37] https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-to-keep-working-when-youre-just-not-feeling-it
[38] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will#History_of_free_will

The earliest use of the word "willpower" as a modern concept was in 1874, expressing a moralistic condemnation of drunkenness.[39] Rooted in the industrial age, it was imagined as a force driving the engine of self-discipline, the way steam powered a train. Those lacking in willpower, and therefore self-discipline, were objects of contempt.

By the mid-twentieth century, B.F. Skinner[40] had nearly sidelined the idea of free will, and thus willpower and self-discipline. He concluded, from his scientific findings, that human behavior was strictly dependent on the "consequences of previous actions," and therefore, predetermined. If free will does not exist, then neither does willpower and self-discipline.

The truth lies between the extremes. Protagonists of predetermined behavior lack understanding of how free will operates.[41] Those touting its supremacy deny its limitations.[42] This discussion reveals the crux of an ongoing struggle: how to do what you intend, but refrain from what you wish to avoid.

Willpower is short-lived, and when it wanes, you are better served by self-discipline.[43] Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." Like the lever with which Archimedes proposed moving the world,[44] willpower is most effective when you use it to form effective habits. Self-discipline is those habits in action. Practice willpower to develop self-discipline.

So do not say to yourself, "I lack willpower and self-discipline." You may currently lack the habit of acting rightly in some area, but that is a skill you can learn and a habit you can develop. Practical methods for developing willpower, self-discipline, and resilience can be learned and practiced, and are discussed next.

Know[3.2-10] Willpower

People recommend willpower like it's a pill, but they don't understand that low energy is influencing their behavior and mood. This simplistic way of thinking isn't just limiting - it's damaging. –Ben Angel, "Unstoppable "

Willpower is the ability to control your own actions, emotions, or urges.[45] Leaving behind the self-criticism and judgmentalism normally associated with it, here are the real facts about willpower:[46]

You need energy to have willpower. Low energy, low willpower.
Willpower is like a muscle that gets tired when overused.
Mental fatigue may result in low willpower and poor decisions.

---

[39] https://nautil.us/issue/45/power/against-willpower

[40] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._F._Skinner

[41] Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Chap 7

[42] "…we were the victims of mental obsession so powerful that no human willpower could break it.", AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions",1952, p22

[43] https://insights.q4intel.com/willpower-vs-self-discipline/

[44] https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/archimedes_101761#:~:text= Archimedes Quotes, Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on,I shall move the world.

[45] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/willpower

[46] Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, "Willpower", 2011 (Blinkist);
Kelly McGonigal, "The Willpower Instinct", 2013 (Blinkist)

You can train your willpower to be stronger.
Changes in one area of life increases willpower in others.
Willpower is less effective when divided between conflicting goals.
Your willpower will fail at times; use positive habits to carry you through.
A Higher Power and supportive community strengthens willpower.
Success is more closely associated with willpower than high self-esteem.
A healthy lifestyle and a positive emotional state increases willpower.
Poor health and negative emotional states decrease willpower.
Repeated exposure to temptation decreases resistance to it.
Attempts to suppress desire or craving often makes them stronger.
Low expectations of results may appear as lack of willpower.
Willpower is short term and temporary.

Here is how to develop willpower and make it work for you:

Keep your energy levels high: Eat a balanced diet. Get sufficient sleep. Exercise regularly. (See Body p. 249)

Use your willpower to set yourself up for success.[47] To cut back on sweets, remove all the junk food from your living area. To work out more, pack your gym bag the night before.

Consider factors that reduce willpower: A helpful acronym is "HALTS".[48] Try not to make major decisions or enter difficult situations when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, or Sick.

Avoid failure through planning: If you are a morning person, go to the gym before work. If you are changing your eating habits, do not push your shopping cart through the cookie aisle. If you are working, remove all distractions from your work area and turn off your phone.

Reduce your need for active willpower with "tiny tasks". It is easier to tackle small tasks than to clump them together into "clean the house" or "finish the project at work". For house cleaning: Wipe down the shower when you are in the shower. Rinse the dishes while waiting for the coffee to brew. Clean the mirror after you wash up. For big projects: Break down large tasks into smaller tasks. Approach goals through milestones. Do one thing at a time.

Develop your willpower gradually, but with purpose.[49] Willpower is both the ability to delay gratification,[50] and to do something difficult. You can easily create your own "willpower development course". These examples may seem trivial, but remember that willpower developed in one area carries over to others. Start with small challenges you know you can accomplish, then gradually increase the difficulty. Here are a few ideas; add your own:

Do without something for a specific time: Skip your morning coffee or lunchtime soda for a day. Avoid social media for two hours. Delay streaming a show or movie for one day. Put off having a snack for 15 minutes.

---

[47] https://stevepavlina.com/blog/2005/06/self-discipline-willpower/
[48] "HALT" is often suggested in recovery. I added "S".
[49] Martin Meadows, "Daily Self-Discipline", ebook
[50] https://www.apa.org/topics/willpower-gratification.pdf

Schedule something extra for a specific time in advance: Choose a room and clean it once a week. Trade screen time (phone / TV / computer) for reading a book. Live cheap for a week (or a day), avoiding all luxuries.

Sometimes you just have to do what sucks. --Dan Bongino

Try cold showers:[51] (Cold showers are not recommended if you are recovering from illness. If you are taking mental health medications, talk to your doctor first.) Cold showers may be beneficial to your physical and mental health by improving metabolism and reducing inflammation. Begin and end a cold shower with warm water. Reduce the shock by starting on your face and neck. Ease into it a few seconds at first, up to several minutes.

Learn something new: Memorize jokes to tell at a party, a line from the Wisdom books for reflection, vocabulary words, or facts that interest you.

Do the hard things first: If you have a to-do list, tackle the hardest ones first. When your willpower fades, you only have the easy tasks left to do.

Do not feed the PIG (Personal Instant Gratification): Gratification is happiness in response to fulfillment of a goal, desire, or need.[52] The ability to delay gratification indicates a mature outlook and is seen as a virtue (patience). "Do not feed the PIG" reminds you that quick rewards usually come at the expense of long-term goals.

Know[3.2-11] Self-Discipline

You can suffer the pain of discipline, or you can suffer the pain of regret.

--Monica, AA Member (Original attribution: Jim Rohn)[53]

Self-discipline is the ability to harness your thoughts, feelings, and actions in support of achieving your goals.[54] Unfortunately, despite your good intentions, some part of yourself will resist your efforts.[55] You have a hidden side that is more rebellious than disciplined, and values comfort over effort. Battling this very human set of traits often increases inner conflict.

Think of self-discipline as coming to terms with, and managing, the part of yourself that throws you off track. You are better off if you try to accept and understand it. Approach it with an open mind and compassion rather than criticism and self-condemnation. It is part of yourself, after all. Think of it as a distracting trickster whose sole aim is immediate gratification and comfort, like an unruly and cranky child.

Your trickster side developed to help you in difficult situations. It always tries to protect your self-esteem and avoid negative emotions.[56] It uses strategies like distraction, procrastination, and avoidance. While they usually work for a short time, such tactics eventually backfire.

---

[51] James W. Williams, “Self-Discipline Mastery”, p104-105
[52] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gratification
[53] https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/218411
[54] Christine Li, PhD, "5-Minute Self-Discipline Exercises"
[55] Theodore Bryant, MSW, "Self-Discipline in 10 Days", 2011
[56] Timothy A. Pychyl, "Solving the Procrastination Puzzle", 2013, Chap 5

The keys to self-discipline require, above all, persistence. They are management skills based on awareness of your goals. Anyone can develop these skills with time and effort.

The first step in developing self-discipline is to work on acceptance of three commonsense truths. You do not have to be perfect on this, but as you practice self-discipline, remind yourself of these three facts:

1. You are 100% accountable for your life.[57] A difficult childhood, poverty, illness, and other misfortunes are factors for self-compassion. But the only person ultimately responsible for your happiness, self-care, and success is you. Life and society may be unfair; take responsibility for yourself.

2. Part of you does not want self-discipline,[58] and never will. This is not a reflection on you, but an aspect of being human. Everyone, regardless of success, deals with this problem. Part of you will always want to procrastinate, distract, and give in to fear. These tendencies become significantly less formidable as you progress.

3. Discomfort is part of the process.[59] When mapping Subjective Units of Discomfort (SUDs) against levels of performance, researchers find a threshold of discomfort that is necessary to produce the best results. If your level of discomfort is too low (or too high) you will not perform as well. Some level of discomfort or difficulty is necessary to make progress.[60]

Next, define your own self-discipline.[61] It is unlikely you require the self-discipline of a U.S. Navy Seal. Although your unconscious image of self-discipline may include a square jaw and six-pack abs, your needs may be as simple as wanting to make your bed in the morning. Review your values and goals, and list the internal and external obstacles in your way. Then, create your own version of self-discipline.

Know[3.2-12] Getting Started

This is where your intentions intersect with reality. The strategy to begin any task is easy and only has 2 parts:

1. No matter how difficult, complex, or scary the overall project is, you can break off or isolate a tiny part of it that you can tackle. It may be as small as putting on your shoes to go to the gym or sitting down at your computer and beginning to type. Find that one tiny specific task and write it down. Make it simple, specific, and concrete.[62]

Can't clean up the whole room? Clean a corner of it. Can't do all the dishes? Do a dish. Can't get in the shower? Wash your face. Always look for the thing you CAN do, with the energy and focus you DO have. Little wins pave the way for bigger wins. 1% beats 0%. --Dr. Glenn Doyle

---

[57] Christine Li, PhD, "5-Minute Self-Discipline Exercises", 2020

[58] Theodore Bryant, MSW, "Self-Discipline in 10 Days", 2011

[59] Kerry L. Johnson, "The Science of Self-Discipline", 1990

[60] https://markmanson.net/pain-is-part-of-the-process

[61] Kerry L. Johnson, "The Science of Self-Discipline", 1999

[62] Timothy A. Pychyl, "Solving the Procrastination Puzzle", 2013, p67

2. Create a list of implementation intentions.[63] These are "if… then…" statements you list under the task you just wrote down. Write the statements in the form, "If [this happens], then [I will do that]." For example:

If I feel tired, then I will take a 10-minute break and stretch.
If I get stuck on a task, then I will take a short walk to clear my mind.
If I procrastinate, then I will set a timer for 15 minutes and focus.
If I am overwhelmed, then I will work on a small part of the task.
If I feel stressed, then I will practice deep breathing.

You can also trigger implementation intentions by time, or an event. Instead of "if", prefix the intention with "when" or "after". For example:

After my morning coffee, then I will make those phone calls.
When it is 4pm, then I will do 1 pushup.

These statements allow you to "predecide" how, when, and where you will accomplish the task.[64] Creating a list of them can be informative and fun. You tackle the fears and procrastination of doing the tasks before you do it. This specificity is more effective than to-do lists because no one knows your avoidance strategies better than you do. You may have to get started many times on the same task.[65] Once started, you will find it easier to continue. Review your implementation intentions often.

Know[3.2-13] Maintaining Momentum

A Simple Truth: the ability to concentrate single-mindedly on your most important task, to do it well and to finish it completely, is the key to great success, achievement, respect, status and happiness in life. --Brian Tracy, "Eat That Frog"

Goals are great to have, but without a system in place, goals will never be reached.

--Marcelle, AA Member

If getting started is the beginning, continuing progress is necessary for success. Developing these 5 habits will help:[66]

1. Planning is deciding in advance how you will direct your future efforts to accomplish your goals.

2. Decision Making is gathering information, weighing alternatives, and proceeding in the right direction.

3. Simplification is the process of cutting away the clutter and complexity in your life. It may seem difficult at first but saves time and energy later.

4. Taking Action is the result of the previous steps. When you take action, do one thing at a time. If you get stuck, return to "3.2-12 Getting Started".

5. Trust Yourself. As you develop self-discipline, success follows. Small improvements are evidence that the process works.

---

[63] Timothy A. Pychyl, "Solving the Procrastination Puzzle", 2013, p68
[64] Timothy A. Pychyl, "Solving the Procrastination Puzzle", 2013, p66
[65] Timothy A. Pychyl, "Solving the Procrastination Puzzle", 2013, p67
[66] Christine Li, PhD, "5-Minute Self-Discipline Exercises", 2020

Dealing with Setbacks

Inhibiting tactics and psychological roadblocks are traps you set for yourself.[67] Maintain your progress through awareness of these traits and behaviors. Inhibiting tactics can be bad goals, procrastination, distractions, or poor time management. Psychological roadblocks are lack of discipline, fear, rejection, or perfectionism.

One of these roadblocks is called the Abstinence Violation Effect (AVE).[68] Although it is primarily discussed in reference to substance abuse, it can be present any time a person attempts behavioral change. AVE may occur when you attempt to change a habit and, after lapsing to your previous behavior, give up completely. For example, say you are cutting back on sweets but have a slice of cake. AVE occurs when you say to yourself, "Well, I've already given in so I might as well eat the whole thing." Or think of anyone who made a New Year's resolution for positive change. Often by mid-February they return to their old ways.

Depending on the changes you are working on, AVE may be triggered by high-risk situations including:[69] stressful events, interpersonal conflicts, social pressure, and negative emotions.

I encountered AVE with a multitude of unhealthy behaviors. Not knowing it was a common, human reaction to behavioral lapse kept me stuck for years. I blamed myself and despised my weakness. Now that you are aware of AVE and its effects, you do not have to fall into the relapse cycle.

Accepting the possibility of occasional slips and having robust coping mechanisms in place is the solution to setbacks. Treating a lapse like any other obstacle and preparing in advance is key. Recognizing the possibility of a lapse does not mean it is inevitable. It is accepting that you are human. With common sense and self-compassion and you can get back on track.

Know[3.2-14] Resilience

You are soft-skinned, and used to shelter and dainties. I could sleep naked in the snow and feel no discomfort, but the dew would give you cramps, were we to sleep in the open.

--Robert E. Howard, "Conan the Barbarian"

A lot of material is available on building resilience. Much of it involves developing various areas of your life[70] as I discuss in Knowledge: Being, Doing, Body, Mind, Emotion, Spirit, Relationships, and Finances. I find this satisfying, an indication that I am on the right track.

---

[67] Peter Hollins, "Finish What You Start", 2018

[68] Passer & Smith, "Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior", 2010, p536

[69] Ibid

[70] Eva Selfhub, MD, "Resilience for Dummies", 2021, describes 6 "pillars" of resilience: Physical Vitality and Flexibility, Developing Mental Toughness and Clarity, Achieving Emotional Equilibrium, Cultivating Spirituality, Striving for Quality Relationships, and Belong to a Community or Team

If you are not currently in difficult times, I urge you to continue your Hero's Journey through the Steps, Knowledge, and Wisdom. Resilience mirrors the structure of the Hero's Journey in many ways.[71] It begins when you find yourself in your comfort zone. You may not feel happy or content, but you have no reason to change your current state. This is the calm before the storm, where your life is stable but not necessarily fulfilling.

Then, a life event, stress, or challenge disrupts this stability. This event might be painful, such as an illness or loss, or it could stem from dissatisfaction with your life, job, or relationships. It prompts you to reconsider your situation and sparks the desire to move beyond your comfort zone.

Leaving your comfort zone can happen in two ways: you may choose to venture into unknown territory, or you may be forced to do so by circumstances beyond your control. Either way, this marks the beginning of your journey into transformation.

As you prepare for change, you begin to gather the necessary skills and qualities to adapt. This phase may be difficult and painful, but it is a necessary step in building resilience to face the challenges ahead. Eventually, change takes place, either gradually or suddenly. It is at this point that you must accept your changing situation and become aware of your personal identity.

In this phase, you have the opportunity to create a new sense of self that reflects the wisdom gained from the experience. This process of self-discovery and transformation may take time, requiring you to integrate your new identity into your daily life.

The final step is reintegration, where your experiences become part of your routine. Reintegration can happen in one of three ways: resilient reintegration, where you become stronger, more adaptable, and open to new possibilities. Or, you may go back to your previous ways, recovered, but not significantly changed. In the worst case, reintegration with loss occurs, where you become angry, bitter, and full of self-pity, feeling worse than before. (See The 12 Steps as The Hero's Journey p. 50)

Resilient reintegration is the healthiest outcome. Since we are dealing with real life, there is no guarantee of a "happily ever after" ending. However, many people who gain resilience through hardship report they feel gratitude, not only for a better life, but also for the circumstances that got them there.[72]

You may prepare for difficult times and tragic events. But when life delivers that gut-punch of tragedy, illness, or loss, the time for preparation is over. You must deal with the situation using the resources you have. Here is what you need to know about resilience:

---

[71] Slightly reformatted, from https://www.udemy.com/course/building-personal-resilience/learn/lecture/13122610?start=30#overview, I adapted the descriptions / explanations; The comparison of resilience to the Hero's Journey is mine.

[72] I cannot count the times I heard someone at an AA meeting introduce themselves as "a grateful alcoholic". This happens when a person's life significantly improves after years of chaos and misery.

Resilience is common, not rare.[73] Many people display resilience even in the process of recovering from tragedy. Methods of coping are diverse and can be messy as people struggle with difficulty and loss. Remember that if other people got through it, so can you.

Know[3.2-15] Building Resilience

Have and use a support network. Unless you are stranded alone on a desert island, you have people around you. Some of these, especially friends and family, may be supportive in difficult times. You will know who you can trust and rely on. Also consider looking for outside help: social programs, support groups of people who experienced similar trauma,[74] or professional counselors or ministers.

Develop Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy.[75] One way of looking at resilience is as the overlap of Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy. This refers to self-esteem as positive self-regard (not narcissism) and the realistic belief that you can accomplish any reasonable task if you try. You can build these skills over time, or work on them as needed. Here are three things you can do:

1. Look at your past and journal similar situations that were as difficult as what you are now facing. They do not have to be a one-to-one match. You are looking for examples where you faced difficult situations and succeeded.

2. At the end of each day, write down three things you did right.[76] They do not have to be big or important. Reflecting that you can do things right reinforces your sense of self-efficacy. (See Step 10 p. 115)

3. Name one thing you can control or have power over today. If you allow powerlessness to lead to despair, it kills hope and undermines resiliency. Remember that you always have power over how you react to circumstances. Ask your Higher Power for guidance, courage, wisdom, and serenity.

Know the "3P's" that block resilience: Permanence, Pervasiveness, and Personalization.[77] Resilience fails when you believe your situation is long-term, affects every aspect of your life, or you take it personally. Recognition of these negative tendencies is helpful in itself.[78] Listing logical reasons on paper why they are not true alleviates some of the burden of your situation.

State the worst case. It may seem counterintuitive but looking at the worst possible thing that could have happened, but did not, relieves stress. You replace some of the tragedy or loss with gratitude that it was not as bad as it could have been.[79] Acknowledging the worst makes anything less, easy.

Accept suffering. Suffering is an inevitable part of life. Learning to accept and deal with it is fundamental to developing resilience. (See The Perennial Struggle p. 13; The Enchiridion p. 656; The Dhammapada p. 709)

---

[73] https://happyproject.in/resilience-psychology/

[74] Linda Graham, MFT, "Resilience", 2018

[75] Jane Clarke and Dr. John Nicholson, "Resilience: Bounce Back…", 2022

[76] Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, "Option B - Facing Adversity…", 2017

[77] Jane Clarke and Dr. John Nicholson, "Resilience: Bounce Back…", 2022

[78] Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, "Option B - Facing Adversity…", 2017

[79] Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, "Option B - Facing Adversity…", 2017

Label your emotions:[80] You will find it easier to deal with confusing and conflicting emotions if you take the time to label them. Emotions can overwhelm you. By sorting them out and labeling them, they are easier to accept. You will better understand the emotion as what you feel, not what you are. (See Emotion p. 345)

Journaling[81] can help you process difficult experiences over time. Although you may want to wait a bit if you just experienced a major trauma, getting your experiences into words generally has a beneficial effect. You do not have to journal for life but may start and stop as you find helpful.

Adopting a positive mindset greatly enhances resilience, and while it can be easier said than done, a sincere effort at optimism offers real benefits.[82] To build a positive mindset, start by finding something you are grateful for, then reframe the current situation in a more positive light. Shift your perspective by finding a positive side. Use prayer and meditation to bring a sense of calm and clarity. Look for meaning in your life or current situation for a deeper sense of purpose. Find something to look forward to. Help someone to uplift their spirits which, in turn, lifts your own.

Habits

Habits are the structure upon which you build your life. They make decisions easy and initiate behavior automatically. You may wonder why good habits are hard to make, and bad habits are hard to break. The answer lies in your unconscious mind.[83]

Note: although the terms "unconscious" and "subconscious" are not identical, they are often used interchangeably.[84] I use the term "unconscious" to refer to any thought, emotion, or behavior that is not immediately accessible to conscious awareness.

In "Truths About Doing," I mentioned the 800-pound gorilla that is your unconscious. Imagine riding on the shoulders of an 800-pound gorilla and trying to convince it you want to go left when the gorilla wants to go right. The gorilla goes where it wants to go. It takes a great deal of energy and persistence to change its direction. So it is with your unconscious mind when you try to change your habits.

There are good reasons your unconscious works this way:

Energy efficient[85] and fast[86]: Your unconscious mind works well with habits. A habit takes little effort or thinking. While consciously solving a problem takes time and energy, your unconscious reacts quickly and easily to help you navigate through complex situations in your daily life.

---

[80] Raj Ragnunathan, "If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Happy?", 2016
[81] Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, "Option B - Facing Adversity…", 2017
[82] Ibid
[83] Harley Pasternak, MSc, "5 Pounds", Chap 9, "The Habit Loop"
[84] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201912/subconscious-vs-unconscious-how-tell-the-difference
[85] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", 2013, Chap 5
[86] Daniel Kahneman, "Thinking, Fast and Slow", 2013, referring to System 1

Difficult to change:[87] When thoughts and behaviors are repeated, they create neural pathways in your brain. If habits were easy to change, they would not be habits. You would have to consciously think about every tiny decision and action every minute of every day.

Good intentions:[88] Your unconscious mind tries to keep you happy and safe based on your previous experience. If your unconscious mind sees that family members yell and throw dishes at each other, it mimics that behavior. If chocolate makes you feel calm, your unconscious says, "Yes, please!"

Your unconscious is powerful and seeks your best interest. That is why you want to consciously develop good habits. Good habits are important to living a good life.

The old idea of ramping up your motivation for 21 days to change your habits is a myth.[89] You may create minor habits in that time, but major changes can take nearly a year.[90] Lifestyle changes can take two to three years.[91] Do not be discouraged by this. You will see immediate benefits while building a new habit. Once it is fully integrated into your life, you will be a different person with a different set of behaviors.

You create new habits through consistent effort over time. It can be a ridiculously small effort.[92] The time frame is important because your brain requires repetition to create the habit. The model for habit formation is "Cue, Response, Reward", and it is the same for both good and bad habits.[93] A situation, thought, or memory acts as a cue that triggers a habit. The habit is an act or behavior for which you receive a reward. The cue, behavior, and reward may not be obvious and may occur at an unconscious level.

Creating Good Habits with Mini Habits[94]

Mini habits are small, achievable actions that lead to significant personal growth over time. By breaking down big goals into tiny, manageable steps, they help you to build consistent routines, boost your confidence, and reduce procrastination. These simple actions, often so small they feel effortless, gradually add up, creating momentum and lasting improvements in your life.

The process of creating new mini habits is fun and easy. It involves six straightforward steps, from selecting meaningful goals to unlearning bad habits. None of these steps are complicated or overwhelming. Instead, they are designed to be enjoyable and rooted in a simple understanding of how your mind and behavior work. This process makes the journey of improvement rewarding and easy to stick to.

---

[87] Norman Doidge, MD, "The Brain that Changes Itself", 2007

[88] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", 2013, "Everyday Habits"

[89] Dana Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", 2019, Chap 8

[90] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", 2013, Chap 1

[91] Dana Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", 2019, Chap 8

[92] Stephen Guise, "Mini Habits", 2013, "The Strategy of Mini Habits"

[93] James Clear, "Atomic Habits", 2018, Chap 3

[94] Unless otherwise noted, from Stephen Guise, "Mini Habits", 2013, and https://www.udemy.com/course/mini-habit-mastery/

Know[3.2-16] Six Steps to Mini Habits

1. Choose Your Goals

Choose 2 or 3 things you want to accomplish, with a maximum of 4. Your goals should be in line with your values, not expectations you have adopted from society, family, or peers. Choose goals that will significantly impact your life. Consider beginning with your First 3 Things. To be sure of your goals, use the "5 Whys" technique.[95] (See Values Clarification p. 166; The 5 Whys p. 343)

2. Convert Your Goals to Mini Habits

For each of your 2 to 4 goals, find the smallest action you can take toward it every day. Think stupidly small… ridiculously small. For example, my First 3 Things and daily mini habits for each are:

Write the Book: write or research for 3 minutes
Work Out: stretch and exercise for 3 minutes
Inner Focus: pray and meditate for 3 minutes

Such minor commitments seem ludicrous and hardly worth doing. That is exactly the point! If they seem silly to my conscious mind, they will also seem silly, and not worth resisting, to my unconscious mind! Fear, procrastination, and distraction are not triggered by such ridiculously small goals. Yet, once I am engaged in these tiny actions, I am mentally free to add bonus reps or time, and nearly always do, as you can see here:

Write the Book: usually an hour or more in several sessions
Work Out: the micro workout, plus time, reps, and cardio
Inner Focus: 20 minutes, and daily readings in Wisdom

But if I am busy, stressed, or procrastinate, I can do all my habits in 9 minutes! It is crazy genius how well this works!

Keep your mini habits stupidly small. To work out, do 1 pushup. To pray and meditate, say 1 prayer. To keep a tidier kitchen, wash 1 dish. Action inspires effort. Once you do the minimum, you can do as much as you want.

The minimum mini habit still creates the habit. This is a fundamental change in focus. Concentrate on creating the habit leading to your goal, not rushing toward the goal itself. Habits of any size are a foundation to achieving more.

Minimize expectations. After your initial success, you will want to increase your goals. There is no reason to do so. Stick with your original mini-habit and do more anytime you want. Consistency matters more than quantity. Do not change your goals lightly.

Watch for goal creep, the unconscious belief that doing more than your mini habit for a few days means you should always do more. This is a trap. Instead, stick to your mini habit and only do extra when you want to. Occasionally, dial back to your minimum to keep expectations in check.

---

95 This technique is used by Stephen Guise in "Mini Habits" but also discussed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_whys

If you find yourself never doing more than your minimum, examine your goal to make sure it is something you really want. If you experience resistance to the habit, make it smaller.

Remind yourself that your mini habits are easy. Never cheat! Even if you do your habits right before you go to sleep, they should be small enough to make that possible. Be happy with your progress every day. Small habits bring impressive results!

Hybrid habits are either/or habits. You can say, "I will either do 1 pushup, OR I will go to the gym." You can build a lot of flexibility into your habits this way. If it adds too much complexity, put it on the backburner till later.

3. Choose Your Habit Cues

The habit model is: cue, response, reward. Choose a cue for each of your mini habits:

Time based: do at a certain time
Activity based: attach to another behavior
Deadline based: anytime during the day before you sleep

Time based cues are deciding to practice your habit at a certain time each day. These may be the weakest type of cues since so many unknowns can interrupt your schedule. Another problem is allowing for more reps or time for each habit. Not knowing when you will or will not put in more effort, it is difficult to schedule your mini habits through the day.

Activity based cues are excellent, especially when linking one habit to another. This is also known as "habit stacking".[96] The idea is that you already have routine behaviors in your day. It is easy, then, to tack on a mini habit to a habit or activity already well established. For example, when I make coffee, I tidy up the kitchen while I wait for it to brew. After you brush your teeth, it is easy for you to do 1 pushup. These really work! The difficulty with activity-based cues are those rare times when your schedule is upset, or if your routine changes.

Deadline based cues may work when nothing else will, especially when the deadline is any time before you go to sleep. This gives you incredible freedom to perform your habits anytime during the day, but in a worst-case scenario, you can do your habits just before you go to bed. It still counts, and you still get full credit! You can also do time or activity-based cues with a fallback of doing them before you sleep.

4. Define Your Tracking and Rewards

Rewards complete the habit model, but be careful not to undermine your intent. For example, a slice of chocolate cake after a workout might not be the best choice. Rewards can also add another thing to track. I keep mine simple, finding the sense of accomplishment each day to be enough.

---

[96] Steve "S.J." Scott, "Habit Stacking", 2017

Tracking progress is important for accountability and can serve as its own reward, like marking a calendar or noting accomplishments in a journal. Eventually, you may find you no longer need to track or reward progress. Doing something for its own sake is often more fulfilling than the secondary reward you attach to it.[97]

5. Monitor For Habit Formation

Your practiced behavior eventually becomes a habit. You can then decide if you want to continue reinforcing it or move on to something else. Be sure you are ready when adding a new habit. When you recognize these signs in your habit, you are successful and can work on another one:

The habit is easier to do than not do.
You feel uncomfortable if you miss a day.
It becomes mindless and automatic.
You never worry about doing it because you know you will.
It seems normal.
It may be boring, but the results are positive.
The behavior becomes part of your identity, shaping how you see yourself.
You do not fear or dread the action; you do not have to get pumped up.[98]

Sometimes, I go through periods of success in keeping good habits, but there are also times when I face internal resistance and feel like I am rebelling against myself. This is part of human nature, and I try not to criticize myself for it. When this happens, I recommit to my habits, even though it can be a messy process full of doubt and discomfort. If you experience this, gentle perseverance is key. Remind yourself of your goals, seek guidance through prayer and meditation, and remember that struggle is part of growth.

6. Breaking Bad Habits

There are five ideas you will find helpful concerning bad habits:

The first thing to make clear about bad habits is that they do not mean you are a bad person. You may have serious levels of bad habits that are harmful to you or others. But you are here, presumably with the intent of doing something about them. That means you are not a loser, evil, or lazy. You want to fix your problems.

Next, psychology and neuroscience have discovered that your mind is made up of multiple facets called "modules".[99] Each module has a specific goal. The problem is that sometimes these modules conflict with one another. For example, one module may want to be healthy, but another may crave the comfort you get from smoking a cigarette or eating a cookie. These modules, trying to be helpful, are the root of your bad habits.

---

[97] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", Chap 10
[98] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", Chap 1
[99] https://www.bakadesuyo.com/2017/12/quit-bad-habits/

Third, the more you try to suppress a bad habit, the stronger it seems to get. This apparent contradiction is at least partially explained by the "ironic processes theory", which says that when you try not to think of something, you think of it more![100] That is how the human mind works. For example, do not think of a pink bunny.

Another difficulty with bad habits is that once formed, they never go away.[101] They fade over time, but if the neural pathway is reactivated, it can become an active habit again. Do not be discouraged though, because habits gradually go dormant and are easily managed if not triggered.

Finally, minor bad habits can be managed on your own, but serious issues like addiction and gambling can destroy your life. Know the difference and do not risk your health and relationships out of pride. If you have severe addiction or behavioral issues, get help.

Know[3.2-17] Three Defenses Against Bad Habits[102]

Avoid the Trigger. First, make a list of every cue that triggers the habit you want to quit. Think of "people, places, and things".[103] List every thought, person, situation, or emotion that makes you think of, and want to engage in, the bad habit. This may be a long list, and that is OK.

Rate your triggers as Avoidable, Difficult to Avoid, or Impossible to Avoid. For example, let us say you want to quit smoking. If your job has a designated smoking area, that trigger is Avoidable. Simply do not go there. However, if your partner also smokes, that trigger is Impossible to Avoid. Be honest in this assessment of your triggers.

Reroute Your Trigger Paths. Since habits never really go away, you cannot erase a bad habit. You can, however, retrain your brain to take a different path when you receive the habit cue.[104] Prepare these actions in advance and have them ready at a moment's notice. Here are five ways to do that:

1. Create a new alternate behavior. If you are trying not to smoke, have a mint instead. If you are trying not to raid the fridge at midnight, walk a hundred steps around your dining room table. It does not matter what you do, *no matter how ridiculous*. Do *anything* except the habit behavior. You may have to do this many, many times. The alternate behavior should require no thought or preparation, and be immediately available. As soon as you notice the trigger, initiate the new, alternate behavior instead.

2. Use implementation intentions as discussed in "Getting Started on Doing". This is having readymade "if… then…" phrases you can turn to at a moment's notice. For example:

If I want to smoke, then I will go for a short walk instead.
If I start to feel angry, then I will stop and take 3 deep breaths.

---

[100] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ironic_process_theory
[101] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", Chap 10
[102] Stephen Guise, https://www.udemy.com/course/mini-habit-mastery/
[103] An aphorism in AA for everything that triggers craving a drink.
[104] Zahra Korsan, "6 Weeks to Happy", 2022, Week 5:Repeat and Rewire

3. Have multiple alternate plans available for various situations. It is helpful to rehearse these alternate actions in advance. Be serious in your intention and commitment. You will find RaDaR helpful in becoming mindful and implementing your new behavior. (See RaDaR p. 306)

4. Change your habit for just one day. It would be nice if you could say to yourself, "I will never [insert bad habit here] again!" and that single statement would last a lifetime. But if humans could do that, we would be robots, programmable by every whim and fleeting emotion. Better to be as we are and build our character through our values and effort.

5. Break your habit for one day at a time, today! This is called "a daily reprieve".[105] Your battleground is not the rest of your life; it is only today. Winning today is everything. Do not worry about forever, concentrate on today. By the way, the second half of the quote above is, "… contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." Prayer and meditation are remarkably helpful in dealing with unhealthy behavior.[106]

Bad habits are sneaky. I cannot count the times I quit smoking and had the thought, "I quit smoking, so now I can smoke." It made perfect sense at the time, like I was in a trance or something. Prepare implementation intentions (if… then…) for moments like that. Be vigilant so that your bad habit does not sneak up on you when you are unprepared or think you have defeated it.

Procrastination

> *The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is now.*
>
> --Chinese Proverb

If you read this chapter through from the beginning, you already have significant understanding of procrastination. Here you will find more specific information. This discussion of procrastination contains three parts:

Know[3.2-18] Understanding Procrastination

Procrastination can actually be helpful at times, or signal a need for change.[107] Sometimes, putting off a task until conditions change can save time and energy. Or, if you consistently procrastinate in a specific area, such as at work, school, or in a relationship, you may not be living within your values.

Your ego may be trying to protect you.[108] If you are a perfectionist, avoid uncomfortable feelings, or fear change, you probably procrastinate.

You find it easier to think short-term than long-term.[109] Humans developed in an environment where actions were driven by basic needs, such as hunger, thirst, and security. The ability to plan and act to secure future benefits came much later.

---

[105] AA World Services, "Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Ed", 2001, p85

[106] https://pathwayhealthcare.com/things-to-do-in-recovery-every-day/

[107] https://mfishbein.com/how-to-overcome-procrastination/

[108] https://mfishbein.com/how-to-overcome-procrastination/

[109] https://mfishbein.com/how-to-overcome-procrastination/

Procrastination is a habit, just like any other. The more you procrastinate, the easier it becomes.[110] Procrastination is a practice for avoidance and magnifies your fears. On the other hand, procrastinating less in one area will spill over into benefits in other areas.

Know[3.2-19] The Process of Procrastination

Imagine four characters that live in your mind:[111]

Rational Decision-Maker: the "smart you", plans ahead and acts responsibly; tries to do the right thing and be productive.

Instant Gratification Monkey: lives in the moment, never worries about the future, prefers comfort, takes the easy way out, has a wonderful talent for distracting the Rational Decision-Maker.

Future You: Instant Gratification Monkey's best friend, will do all the work and take responsibility for everything… but Future You does not exist! By the time the future arrives, Future You has moved on. You are stuck with the consequences of your procrastination!

Panic Monster: takes charge at the last minute to scare you into acting, often too late to do your best work or even finish the task. For a procrastinator, your Panic Monster is the only thing that can make your Instant Gratification Monkey shut up for a while. What a terrible way to live and get things done!

These four characters interact on a playground. It is divided into four areas I will call quadrants (known as the Eisenhower Matrix, see Appendix):[112]

Q1 Important and Urgent: In this quadrant are all the crises in your life, the deadlines, emergencies, and all the dire things that must be completed right now in a state of absolute panic!

Q2 Important but Not Urgent: the important things that do not have to be completed immediately, long term planning, large projects, skills practice, relationships, working on your values, exercise, all the things that go toward living a good life.

Q3 Urgent but Not Important: phone ringing, a text message, a double-sink full of dirty dishes, piles of laundry, some work-related actions, personal activities. These are often the "I should… need to… have to…" tasks that you let pile up. They make great excuses and distractions when you do not want to work on important stuff in Q2.

Q4 Not Important and Not Urgent: time wasters, fun stuff, procrastinator's paradise, social media.

---

110 https://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/asc/1/documents/StudySkills/Procrastination.pdf

111 Tim Urban, from the blog series at https://waitbutwhy.com

112 The Eisenhower Matrix is discussed by: Tim Urban, from the blog series at https://waitbutwhy.com; Stephen R. Covey, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People", 1989, p150; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_management

You can see how this works. Your Rational Decision-Maker wants to focus on important stuff in Q2, while your Instant Gratification Monkey distracts you by pushing you into Q3 (acting busy) or Q4 (wasting time). When it is almost too late, the Panic Monster forces you into Q1, PANIC MODE!

To stay balanced, spend time in all quadrants, but Q2 is where you are most productive. There, you can work without stress, avoid wasting time, and use your energy effectively. If you are a procrastinator, you do not need to worry about overdoing Q2. Spend as much quality time there as you can.

Know[3.2-20] Managing Procrastination:[113]

To deal with procrastination, recognize who is in charge and which quadrant you are in. Acknowledging that you are not focused on what is important is the first step toward getting better. (See Short-Term Strategy, RaDaR p. 218)

Examine the task at hand and review its necessity and importance. If the task must be accomplished eventually (but before the Panic Monster drags you into Q1), then you are better off to begin immediately. Likewise, if the task is important (for example, one of your First 3 Things) you will feel better if you get started. However, if the task may change or become unnecessary, add it to your calendar or Reminders list for later. (See Lists p. 228)

Remember the 800-pound gorilla. If the gorilla does not believe you can accomplish the task, progress is unlikely. Spending time creating workable plans is very effective. Large projects can be broken down to manageable tasks. (See SMARTER Goals p. 233; WOOP p. 231)

Examine the future results of your behavior in the present. Procrastination is a choice with consequences. On one side of a sheet of paper, make notes on the probable outcome of your procrastination. On the other side, write the desired outcome of accomplishing the task in question. Bringing potential rewards and consequences of your action from the remote future into the immediate present can help you make the right choice.

Try to make it easier to complete the task and harder to procrastinate. When you work, turn off your phone and eliminate distractions. Prepare for a task (gather materials, pack supplies, etc.) the day before, if possible. Reduce the need for willpower so that when you are confronted with the task, your only option is to complete it.

Lower your expectations. Even a perfect job can be boring and tedious. A dream house can have flaws. And the love of your life is human, after all. Expecting and accepting things to go other than you desire is a sign of maturity. Dealing with inevitable setbacks builds resilience.

Find meaning in what you are doing. Sometimes you need to look at the big picture to remind yourself why the task in front of you is important. Working a tedious job is worthwhile if it puts food on the table for you and your family. Trivial tasks take on new importance if they are part of your self-care.

---

[113] https://mfishbein.com/how-to-overcome-procrastination/; I used the basic outline of this article but changed the details

Pray and meditate. Procrastination is often both the cause and the result of inner conflict. Prayer and meditation can reduce that conflict, and thus be helpful in relieving procrastination.

Live in your values. Knowing your values and holding to them is fundamental to living a good life. It is essential to your happiness and sense of fulfillment. Review your values often, as they may change with age and personal growth.

Unconscious Motives

When you fail to do what you want to do, (including procrastination) the problem may be rooted in psychological issues outside of your direct awareness. But remember that insight, alone, may not be sufficient to change your behavior.[114] With the proper tools, however, insight into your unconscious motives can be translated into forward momentum. Five examples are listed, followed by two strategies to counter them.

Know[3.2-21] Pride and Self-Esteem

In "1.1 My Story" I described my need to appear intelligent to others. It was tied to my self-esteem. Because of that I attended a difficult college and majored in math and computer science. The problem was, I had no study skills and did not like math. I dropped out before I flunked out (twice).

Had I attended a different school, or taken courses I was more interested in, my entire life would have been different. But I was proud and unable to adapt. Being invested in erroneous beliefs blinded me to other options. I was trapped by lack of insight.

Know[3.2-22] Unknown Psychological Dynamics

A friend of mine has health and financial issues. You may know someone like this, too: when you try to help by offering the most obvious solution to one of their problems, they reply with, "Yeah, but…", followed by some reason they cannot implement it. Every solution, regardless of practicality, is met with a similar reply. It is a tactic that kills conversation and cooperation.[115] I find it frustrating, irritating, and incomprehensible.

This type of interaction is so widespread that it was documented in a book on interpersonal relations.[116] Two people in a conversation like this enter into a psychological Parent/Child relationship. One person takes on the role of a "child" seeking attention from the "parent".[117] They are unaware that the conversation has shifted from problem solving to an unconscious personal interaction. Lack of insight into the psychological motivations on both sides causes the conversation to be repeated over and over without resolution. (See Codependency p. 445).

---

[114] Angela Browne-Miller, "Rewiring Yourself to Break Addictions and Habits", 2009, Chap 17

[115] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-help-friend/201801/how-yabut-can-kill-conversation

[116] Eric Berne, "Games People Play, The Psychology of Human Relationships", 1964, Chapter 8, "Why Don't You - Yes, But"

[117] https://www.nlpschool.com/games-people-play-yes-but-game/

Know[3.2-23] Inner Conflicts and Cycles of Behavior

While failing college calculus, I sought help to correct chronic procrastination on my assignments. I was told I had an "approach-avoidance conflict".[118] A vague label without a solution was not helpful. I already knew there were things I could not do (my assignments), things I could not resist (procrastination), and cycles in my behavior (I took calculus 5 times).

I did not learn from my experiences because I was driven by unconscious conflicts not accessible through willpower. As I found out later, my inconsistent actions were caused by competing behavior "modules".[119] My need to "be smart" conflicted with my fear of failure and lack of confidence.

Know[3.2-24] Shadow Self

[W]hen one tries desperately to be good and wonderful and perfect, then all the more the shadow develops a definite will to be black and evil and destructive… The fact is that if one tries beyond one's capacity to be perfect, the shadow descends into hell and becomes the devil. For it is just as sinful from the standpoint of nature and of truth to be above oneself as to be below oneself. It is surely not the divine will in man that he should be something which he is not, for when one looks into nature, one sees that it is most definitely the divine will that everything should be what it is. --Carl Jung

Your shadow is the part of yourself that you deny. It is the emotional responses you rejected and cut off from yourself since before you can remember. Your shadow is an amalgamation of the fear, anger, and pain in your life that you were not allowed or chose not to feel.[120] You often see in others the problems you are hiding from yourself. This is called projection.[121] Your shadow side can have a negative impact on your happiness and relationships. (See Your Relationship with Yourself p. 428)

Know[3.2-25] Threats to Identity[122]

Anything you think will change your view of yourself is a threat. If you see yourself as unlovable, then a relationship with someone who cares about you is a threat to your self-image. If you think of yourself as tough and street-smart, you will probably not choose a career or lifestyle in opposition to that. If you identify as a spiritual seeker, you cannot allow yourself to find the answers you seek.

Your mind reacts this way because you defend your identity as passionately as you defend your physical body. It is, after all, *you.* Your mind reasons that maintaining your self-image is a successful survival strategy. You got this far, after all, so you must be doing something right. Any change to your identity (even if it is for the better) is scary and dangerous.

---

118 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Approach-avoidance_conflict
119 https://www.bakadesuyo.com/2017/10/more-mindful/
120 Scott Jeffrey, "A Complete Guide to Working With Your Shadow", 2017
121 Gay Hendricks, "The Big Leap: Conquer Your Hidden Fear and Take Life to The Next Level", 2010, Blinkist Edition
122 https://markmanson.net/how-to-stop-procrastinating

Know[3.2-26] Short-Term Strategy, RaDaR

I introduced RaDaR in 2.10 Step 10 as a tool for daily inventory. You can also apply it with great success to examining your habits and routines for accomplishing your tasks. (See pages 116, 218, 260, 306, 384, 447, 788)

Reflect: Pause and examine your current state regarding the task you are avoiding. Notice what emotions, thoughts, or physical sensations arise when you consider doing it. Ask yourself, "Why am I delaying? What am I feeling now?" You may recognize anxiety, frustration, or a lack of motivation. Admit indulging in distractions or avoidance behavior. Allow yourself to fully observe and acknowledge what is happening beneath the surface.

Describe: Put into words what you discovered. Better yet, write it down. Use specific, neutral language to describe your emotions and patterns. Avoid self-criticism or blaming others. Instead of saying, "I am lazy," you might say, "I am avoiding this task because I feel overwhelmed." Instead of beating yourself up, say, "I procrastinate when I don't know how to start." Acknowledge the real reasons, whether it is perfectionism, fear of failure, lack of confidence, or discomfort. Describing the situation clearly transforms vague avoidance into something tangible and workable.

Respond: Now, choose your course of action. Be sure it aligns with your values and the will of your Higher Power. Try breaking the task up into smaller steps and start the first one immediately. If fear of failure holds you back, focus on simple progress. If the task feels meaningless, connect it to a larger purpose. Try reframing the situation to reduce the pressure on yourself. Or, simply begin, trusting that momentum will carry you forward. Whatever action you take, do it consciously, in alignment with your deeper purpose. Take immediate action to break your inertia and move forward.

Know[3.2-27] Long-Term Strategy, Work the Steps

I stated earlier that if an issue is worthy of your concern, it is worth working the Steps on. You can create a custom version of the Steps to assist with any issue. Whether you have difficulty with clutter, procrastination, creating good habits, breaking bad habits, or any other Doing issue, working the Steps will align your purpose with your Higher Power.

You will remain stuck if you are at odds with yourself. You must be aware of conflicting motivations before you can address them. Internal conflict is a waste of time and energy, two of your most valuable resources. It is an exhausting and miserable way to live.

Finding and correcting unsuccessful unconscious motivations is a lifelong endeavor. The tools necessary to transform insight into change are as varied as the people that seek them and the needs that drive them. You may find exactly what you need by working the Steps and reading Knowledge and Wisdom. Work on self-compassion. Be honest and be kind to yourself. Review your values. Pray and meditate for guidance, courage, and strength. Get professional help if you need it. Your best efforts result when your cause is noble, your heart pure, and your mind calm.

Time

Know[3.2-28] Chronos and Kairos

Half of doing is doing. The other half is not doing. Just as you cannot force a rose to bloom, you cannot accomplish a task before its time. Some ancient cultures had two concepts of time.[123] For the Greeks, they were "Chronos" and "Kairos".[124] Think of Chronos as "clock time". Clock time is measurable and inevitable. It drives entropy and decay. It makes you old. Once passed, it is gone forever. Most people live in, and are prisoners of, clock time.

Kairos, on the other hand, cannot be measured. It is time beyond your control. It is the occurrence of events, like the blooming of the rose, when the time is right. Kairos is beyond cause and effect. It is beyond understanding. You may call Kairos "fate". Some call it "God's time."

Chronos is active. Kairos is passive. Chronos is a schedule. Kairos is experience. Chronos is Type A. Kairos is Type B. Chronos is "let's do this." Kairos is "when the time is right." Chronos gives you a sense of control. Kairos is the flow of existence.

Action and refraining from action are the imbrication of Chronos and Kairos. Achievement is less about the minutiae of productivity than the wisdom of acting rightly. This entire section of "Doing" is a result of that understanding. Life is easier when you look at the choices immediately in front of you and do your best.

There is a lot of apparently contradictory advice on when to act and when to refrain from acting. There is no perfect formula. You can only make your best choice and accept the results.

"Do the next right thing" is a staple of recovery programs. It reduces time to a moment, and choices to the small and simple.[125] When conflicted between action and nonaction, reduce your burden. Simplify the choice. Pray for guidance and do the next right thing; sometimes the next right thing is doing nothing at all. That is the essence of wisdom, and the lesson of Chronos and Kairos.

Do it immediately, do it with prayer;
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His hand
Who placed it before thee with earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,
Leave all results, do the next thing.
--From Do the Next Thing, Mrs. George A. Paull

---

[123] Greek and Indian, as mentioned here: https://www.mckinleyvalentine.com/post/chronos-vs-kairos-understanding-how-the-ancient-greeks-viewed-time-will-make-your-life-richer

[124] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kairos

[125] https://thoughtcatalog.com/rezzan- huseyin/2017/11/ just-do-the-next-right-thing-how-one-simple-sentence-can-completely-change-your-life/

Know[3.2-29] Pareto Principle[126]

The Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule, is an observation that many phenomena hold to an 80/20 ratio. For example, 80% of a company's sales comes from 20% of their customers. Eighty percent of charitable donations come from 20% of the donors, and so on. Such generalizations are rarely exact but give us a model to work with in many areas.

For productivity, you can say that 80% of your results come from 20% of your effort.[127] In other words, figure out when you are most alert, energetic, and productive, and work on your most difficult tasks then. Reschedule tasks that consume time or energy but produce minimal results.

You can use the 80/20 rule in many areas:[128] Find the 20% of the tasks on your To-Do list that give the best results for your efforts. Choose the 20% of books, articles, social media, and videos that provide the greatest enhancement to your life and well-being. Spend 80% of your social time with the 20% of your friends and family who are most accepting and supportive.

Planning

Planning is the process of thinking about the activities needed to solve problems[129] and accomplish goals.[130] Plans may also support general improvement or moving your life in a better direction. This is called "domain or directional planning".[131] The 12 Steps to a Good Life are an example of nonspecific directional planning because they make your life better. Think of them as a plan for change.

Planning, decision-making, and problem solving are closely related skills and often rely on each other. Although plans can help you achieve your goals, your plans can fail for three reasons.[132]

Know[3.2-30] Three Reasons Plans Fail

1. Your goals are too vague.
2. Your plans do not reflect your goals and values.
3. You lack support or confidence in what you want to do.

Without clarity on what you want to achieve, you may struggle to break down your goals into manageable steps. A lack of reflection leads to plans that do not reflect your values, causing confusion and lack of motivation. Without the support of others or confidence in your abilities, you may avoid detailed planning. These factors combine so that planning becomes an afterthought or avoided, leading to poor preparation and missed opportunities.

---

[126] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto_principle
[127] https://www.tonyrobbins.com/productivity-performance/pareto-principle/
[128] https://medium.com/accelerated-intelligence/most-people-think-this-is-a-smart-habit-but-its-actually-brain-damaging-7f71949cc128
[129] https://extension.psu.edu/the-seven-steps-of-action-planning
[130] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planning
[131] https://opentextbc.ca/principlesofmanagementopenstax/chapter/the-planning-process/
[132] https://careervision.org/backwards-planning-great-strategy-find-hard-get-started/

Know[3.2-31] Eight Step Planning Guide[133]

Step 1. Define the problem, goal, or change.

Examine the object of your plan in detail. Be specific. Write it down. Trying to solve the wrong problem, achieve a goal you do not really want, or make a change not in accordance with your values will only cause more problems. (See SMARTER Goals p. 233; WOOP p. 231)

Step 2. Develop tasks to solve the problem or achieve the goal.

If you are not sure what tasks are required, you must gather information or do research. Be sure the tasks are practical, and you have sufficient skill and confidence to accomplish each task. This may require task dependencies, or sub-tasks. For example, you may need to take a class before you can apply for a promotion, and so on. For each task:

List your assumptions and biases. Since you are planning into the future, you are making numerous assumptions about future conditions. Within the context of your plan, be diligent and honest in rooting these out. Pay attention to what you think you know, but has not been verified.

Break down large tasks into small tasks. Your plan will be more flexible, easier to maintain and evaluate, and you will be less prone to procrastination.

List resources you need for each task. Every part of your plan will require something: skills, information, time, materials, effort, finances, or help from other people. List the resources you need, where you will find them, and what they will cost in return.

Step 3. Create a timeline to link the tasks.

This is where your plan takes shape. Look at different ways of arranging and accomplishing the tasks. You may find a better solution using alternative plans. Consider the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to each plan (called a SWOT analysis[134]). Two additional tools in creating your plan are backward planning and contingency planning.

Backward Planning

Your plan is a timeline of tasks. Backward planning is a common approach to creating it. It works by assigning dates to your final goal and the supporting tasks you must accomplish to achieve it:

Assign a date when you want to complete the project, achieve the goal, or make the change.

Identify the last step to your goal. Estimate the time it will take to accomplish this step and write it on a calendar or timeline.

---

133 Modified from multiple sources, including:
https://extension.psu.edu/the-seven-steps-of-action-planning
https://www.toppr.com/guides/business-studies/planning/planning-process/,
https://byjus.com/commerce/planning-process/
Managing All-in-One For Dummies, p29-30, 2014

134 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis

Now make note of the next-to-the-last step, and each previous step in reverse order. Make your best estimate and place them on the calendar in your timeline.

You may have to adjust your timeline or task estimate now or when you implement your plan. This is normal; be flexible and do not get discouraged. Stay focused on your goal or solving your problem.

Contingency Planning

Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face.

--Mike Tyson[135]

A contingency is the occurrence of an unpredicted event.[136] Contingency plans are developed to alleviate risk in case the unexpected happens.[137] They are preparation for unintended outcomes and events when you implement your plan. A plan that neglects contingency planning is incomplete. Remember Murphy's Law, "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong."[138]

Developing contingency plans is best approached systematically but must respect the context of the primary plan. An excellent method of contingency planning is reviewing your primary plan while asking, "what if…?" Suppose you are planning to buy a house. You can ask yourself the following questions:

What if I get sick and have medical bills to pay?
What if the neighborhood real estate values go down?
What if I change jobs and need to move?
What if my children or partner do not like the neighborhood?

As you go through your "what if's", estimate how likely the event is to occur. This is called a Risk Management assessment.[139] For example, your new house will probably not be hit by a meteorite, but it could be flooded if you live in a flood plain. You want to look at three things when you consider contingencies:

How likely is it to happen?
How much damage will it do to your plan?
What is the cost (in time, money, or effort) to mitigate the risk?

In some cases, your answers to these questions will be an almost arbitrary guess. In others, gathering pertinent information will allow you to make educated estimates. Based on those considerations, develop a plan for what you would do in each situation.

---

135 https://www.quora.com/Did-Mike-Tyson-say-everybody-has-a-plan-until-they-get-punched-in-the-face?share=1
136 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contingency
137 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contingency_plan
138 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murphy's_law
139 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risk_management

Put more effort into contingencies that are high risk and high damage to your plan. Then you must decide if you are willing to pay the cost for your plan to succeed.

You may decide your plan is not workable and you need to find another solution. Either way, if difficulties arise, you will be prepared. Be realistic and honest when reviewing your plans. Diligently note and create a contingency plan for each point where the unexpected may occur.

Step 4. Devise methods to track your progress.

Once you set your plan in motion you need ways to make sure you stay on track and on schedule. Matching your timeline to your actual progress will provide most of your feedback. But you may also want to put quality control measures in place to ensure each task is completed thoroughly and on time. For a large project, this will require keeping detailed notes. Schedule an after-action review after each major task to review what you did well and what you could do better.[140] This will streamline your workflow and prevent recurring mistakes in future tasks.

Step 5. Finalize the plan.

Review your plan from beginning to end. Be thorough, do not cut corners. Make sure you have addressed each of the following:

Create a timeline for each task leading up to your goal.
Develop contingency plans for anything that could go wrong.
Put quality controls in place to see that each task is properly completed.
Devise methods to evaluate your progress.
Schedule after action reviews following each task.

Step 6. Rehearse the plan.

To do something well, rehearse it.[141] If you want to get up as soon as your alarm goes off, practice setting your alarm, pretending to sleep, hearing your alarm, and jumping out of bed.[142] You may feel foolish, but it works.[143]

Physical rehearsals are always the best. Rehearsals also pinpoint practical issues that may not be apparent during the planning phase. If you cannot rehearse the task, talk yourself through it while you diagram it on paper. If your plan involves a team, involve everyone in your rehearsal.

Step 7. Implement your plan.

Now the real work begins. Implement your plan by approaching the first task on your timeline. Work on this task until it is finished, then move on to the next. Revise your contingency plans when necessary. If you are working with a team, encourage communication between team members.

---

[140] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/After-action_review

[141] The U.S. Army trains soldiers to rehearse actions as realistically as possible for the best chance of success. SH 21-76 Ranger Handbook

[142] Aaron Price, "The Low Attention Span Guide To Motivation"

[143] https://stevepavlina.com/blog/2006/04/how-to-get-up-right-away-when-your-alarm-goes-off/

Step 8. Monitor and evaluate your plan.

In step 4 of Planning, you devised methods to track your progress. As you work on each task, insure you are on schedule and each task is completed properly. Conduct an after-action review and make note of what went well and what you could have done better. Revise your plan as necessary when new information becomes available. Continue until your plan is complete.

> *The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.*
>
> --Robert Burns, Translated from "To a Mouse"[144]

No matter how precise and detailed your plans are, they rarely go as expected. This is when flexibility and resiliency pay off. Life is messy, and you live in a real world where things go wrong, and people make mistakes. Try to adopt a Stoic (or spiritual) attitude regarding the result of your efforts.

The phrase "Let go and let God" has meaning in several contexts,[145] but in this case it means to shift your focus away from the outcome. You can make the plan and do the work, but that does not guarantee success. Focusing on your intention and efforts reduces stress and makes the process more enjoyable.[146] Sometimes a plan that does not work out exactly as you want works out better than you expect.

Organize

Personal organization can be compared to a work of art.[147] When you are organized, you have more quality time, more serenity, and less stress. Lack of organization creates anxiety and more problems. It sucks your energy and kills motivation and creativity. The results of disorganization are like weights you have to carry everywhere. It makes you feel overwhelmed all day long.

Have you ever been late for work and cannot find your car keys?
Did you ever pay a late fee because you lost a bill?
Have you missed an appointment or meeting because you forgot?

Symptoms of disorganization seem easy to fix, but they are cumulative and systemic. Being organized (or not) is a habit. It takes time to change. But if you work on it, you will feel better.[148] The effort and sacrifice are worth it.

Organization must be tailored to your personality and circumstances.[149] There are many specific and detailed methods to get organized, far too many to list here. But discussions of developing organizational skills often have common themes: allocation of space, resources, and time.

---

[144] https://scottjsmith.wordpress.com/2010/09/08/the-best-laid-plans-of-mice-and-men-often-go-awry/

[145] https://www.coreytrevathan.com/let-go-and-let-god/

[146] https://www.theepochtimes.com/why-you-shouldnt-fixate-on-the-outcome-3_4189907.html

[147] Bernstel and Windhaus, "10 Minute Guide to Getting Organized", 2000, Introduction

[148] Gretchin Rubin, "Outer Order, Inner Calm", 2019

[149] Katie & Kelly McMenamin, "Organize Your Way", 2017, refer to "PixieTypes"; Gretchin Rubin, "Outer Order, Inner Calm", 2019, has developed what she calls "the Four Tendencies framework"

Know[3.2-32] Three Categories of Organization

Organize Your Personal Space: the places you live and work are direct reflections of your level of organization. Take an objective look at the rooms you live in, your vehicle, and your work area. If your space is cluttered, messy, and dirty, ask yourself why that is. Maybe you are too tired, or too busy, or you just put things off. You can change this one space at a time. Choose an area, a day, and a time. Allot one hour to tidy that space up. It does not have to be perfect; it only needs to be better than it was. When you have done that, designate the next space and the next time. Continue this by rotation and eventually, all of your personal spaces will be tidied up.

Organize Your Resources: your resources are time, energy, attention, and finances. When you value your time and health, when you declutter and simplify your life, you automatically begin to regulate your use of resources. Pay attention to your emotions and relationships, as they can drain your energy. Work on specific areas, one at a time.

Organize Your Time: Use a notebook or device to keep notes concerning anything you need to remember. Using your notes and a calendar, you will never be late or miss an appointment (barring unforeseen circumstances). You will not forget items you need when you go shopping. You will save yourself time and stress by being at the right place at the right time.

Know[3.2-33] 5S Method[150]

The 5S methodology is a Japanese system for organizing and maintaining efficient, clean, and safe workspaces. It consists of five steps:

Sort: Eliminate unnecessary items from the workspace.
Set in Order: Arrange necessary items so they are easy to access and return.
Shine: Clean the workspace regularly to maintain standards.
Standardize: Establish schedules to maintain the first three steps.
Sustain: Develop habits to keep the system in place over time.

Time Management

There is a myth of time management. The myth is that you can manage time. With the exception of Einsteinian physics (i.e. extreme speeds and gravity wells),[151] time always flows the same. You have 24 hours in a day. That is 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds. Time is always the same, all of the "time".

You can change two things in your relation to time: your perception of it, and what you do within a span of it. So, "time management" has less to do with time, and more to do with you. Time does not come in categories.[152] Time is not good, bad, exciting, or boring. It just is. There is no work time, free time or play time. These are artificial categories that you, like most of us, impose on yourself.

---

[150] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5S_(methodology)
[151] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_dilation
[152] Jeff Sanders, "The Free Time Formula", 2018, Blinkist Synopsis

The second fundamental lesson of time management is that you can do whatever you like with the time you have.[153] Unless you are physically impaired, you are free to spend your time any way you choose. You may have obligations, and you will certainly face the consequences of your actions, but what you do with your time is your choice and your responsibility.

Teaching yourself the skills of time management is akin to herding cats. It is a process requiring patience with yourself and your circumstances. Remember to treat yourself with kindness; use a carrot, not a stick. In other words, the rewards of good time management outweigh the results you will achieve through self-judgment and self-criticism. Use the tools, monitor your progress, and adjust your habits as necessary. With persistence and a positive attitude, your progress is inevitable.

There is a great deal of overlap between decluttering, time management, and organization. Following is a list of ideas and tips.[154] Some will apply to you, others will not. Pick one or two that apply and work on them. When they become habits, move on to the next.

These are only examples. Rather than being an exhaustive list of techniques, they illustrate the attitude and outlook necessary to manage your time while decluttering and simplifying your life.

Know[3.2-34] Time Management Tips

Let Your Values Guide You: Align your activities with your values to make positive progress toward your goals.

Log Your Time: Track your activities for a few days or weeks to see how much time you are dedicating to your values.

Write Everything Down: Keep proper notes using a notepad or an app for meetings, reminders, shopping lists, etc. This helps you stay organized and remember important details.

Make Conscious Choices: Ask yourself if you are using your time wisely. Be honest when you are wasting time, and work to improve your habits.

Use the Pomodoro Technique:[155] Set a timer for 20-25 minutes of focused work, followed by a 5-10 minute break. Adjust times to fit your workflow.

Prioritize Health: Health is essential for energy, willpower, motivation, and resilience. Make exercise, nutrition, and rest as important as other tasks.

Organize Your Life: Being organized helps you use your time more productively. Organization does not limit creativity, it enhances it.

---

153 Jeff Sanders, "The Free Time Formula", 2018, Blinkist Synopsis
154 This list is combined from multiple sources:
Jeff Sanders, "The Free Time Formula", 2018, Blinkist Synopsis
MindTools.com,, "The Time Management Toolkit", 2009
Rosemary Tator and Alesia Latson, "More Time for You", 2011
Alan Lakein, "How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life", 1973
Dirk Zeller, "Successful Time Management for Dummies", 2009
Richard Walsh, "Time Management", 2008
155 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique

3.2 Doing

A place for everything, and everything in its place. --English Proverb

Declutter for Mental Clarity: Remove unused items that create distractions and psychological baggage. Simplify your space to free up both physical and mental energy.

Treat Decluttering as an Appointment: Schedule time to declutter. The effort will pay off with a more organized space and a clearer mind.

Start Small When Decluttering: If you do not know where to start, begin anywhere. Put away one item, donate one object, or clean one room.

Take Before-and-After Photos: Track your progress by taking photos before and after decluttering. This will motivate you and showcase your improvements.

Plan and Schedule Your Time: Have a clear plan for your day. Organizing your time increases efficiency, except when you are intentionally taking time off.

Manage Interruptions: Close your door for privacy, schedule meetings, and handle emails at once. Be patient with interruptions from loved ones or pets, and focus on one task at a time.

Use All Your Waking Hours: Even small blocks of time can be productive. Track your time and reduce wasted moments.

Make the Most of Downtime: Use your free time meaningfully, whether by reading, spending time with loved ones, or pursuing hobbies that align with your values.

Reduce Distractions: Social media and other distractions can derail your goals. Limit exposure to distractions and stay focused on what matters.

Learn to Say "No": Prioritize your goals and be selective about what you commit to. Saying "no" to nonessential tasks protects your time.

Manage Documents Efficiently: Create a simple system to organize digital and paper documents. An inbox and a filing system are a good start.

Two-Minute Rule: If a task will take less than two minutes to complete, do it immediately instead of adding it to your to-do list.

Take Time Off: Rest and relaxation are vital to prevent burnout. Allow yourself breaks and time away from productivity.

Build Small Daily Habits: Start with simple tasks like making your bed, washing dishes, and taking out the trash. These small habits help create structure.

I'm doing better. I just need to clean my room. --Haley, AA Member

Organize with Containers: Use bins and containers to store and organize your items. Make sure they are stackable, transportable, and manageable on your own.

Simplify Your Possessions: Get rid of things you do not need. If you are unsure, temporarily store them away. If you do not miss them, donate or dispose of them.

Plan Meals in Batches: Prepare meals in large batches to simplify cooking throughout the week.

Protect Your Mental Health: Cut back on social media or news that makes you feel angry or depressed. Limit your screen time, especially before bed.

Explore Low Technology Hobbies: Find hobbies unrelated to technology, like reading, gardening, or art. These activities offer a break from screens.

Make Decisions with the Long-Term in Mind: Consider how your choices today affect your future. Small decisions compound to shape your life.

Focus on One Task at a Time: Multitasking makes you less efficient. Prioritize tasks and complete them one at a time.

Recognize Your Limits: Understand your constraints, whether time, finances, or energy, and work within them. Accept resistance from others and adapt accordingly.

Break Large Tasks into Smaller Steps: Tackle big tasks by breaking them down into manageable steps. For example, decluttering a closet can be approached as cleaning shelves, reducing clothing, and tidying up.

Do Not Let Setbacks Derail You: If you need something you got rid of, do not use it as an excuse to stop decluttering. Focus on the benefits of simplifying your life.

Declutter Your Thoughts and Emotions: When simplifying your physical space, also work on decluttering your mind. Let go of negative thoughts and emotions to create a calmer, more focused mindset. (See Mind p. 289; Emotion p. 345)

If you feel the weight of clutter upon you, it isn't the physical things that are weighing you down, it is the decisions you have to make about who you are and what you want…

--Tania O'Donnell, "Declutter Your Life"

Lists

The first thing I do when I make a list is to put 'Make a list' at the top, and immediately cross it off. That way, I've already gotten something done. --Melissa S.[156]

Lists of various kinds have been around since the beginning of recorded civilization. Some of the oldest known writings in the world, 5,000-year-old Sumerian clay tablets, were inventory lists of agricultural products.[157] A list is "a set of discrete items of information collected and set forth in some format for utility, entertainment, or other purposes."[158] There are many kinds of lists, serving many different, but specific and useful, purposes.

---

[156] Melissa S. advises the reader that she did not originate this idea

[157] https://www.ancient-origins.net/artifacts-ancient-writings/sumerian-tablets-0011895

[158] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List#Kinds_of_lists

Understanding how to use them effectively can help you tackle tasks with less stress and more focus.

Know[3.2-35] Types of Tasks and How to Categorize Them

Not every task needs to be on a to-do list. There are several types of task-driven lists. Understanding the different types of tasks can help you decide what goes on which type of list. There are five key types of tasks:[159]

1. Priority Tasks: These are your "First 3 Things" and any other tasks that are value-driven or need to be completed today. Do not overload yourself. Be realistic about what you can accomplish in a day. Include your First 3 Things, and add the absolute essential "To-Do's" that must be completed.

2. Indicated Tasks: Obvious, recurring tasks like laundry, house cleaning, or personal hygiene. Rather than add them to your list, designate a specific time to tackle them. You do not need to remind yourself of these, because they are right in front of you. Make them part of your routine.

3. Contingent Tasks: Tasks that depend on other tasks being completed first. They are connected to "stacked habits," or tasks that naturally flow from one to the next. For example, clean the kitchen after cooking. Meditate after your workout. Create as many of these linked tasks as possible.

4. Scheduled Tasks: Tasks or events that have a set date or time. If something is scheduled for tomorrow, put it on your calendar, not your to-do list.

5. Reminders: Tasks that are not urgent but need to be done at some point. For example, you may want to work on long-term projects like organizing your office, picking up a hobby, or cleaning the garage. Add them to a reminders list, or move them to your calendar.

Only priority tasks need to be on your to-do list. Keep your list focused and avoid adding tasks that can be handled with a schedule or reminders list.

Know[3.2-36] Types of Lists[160]

Below, I discuss four types of lists: To-do, Reminders, Checklists, and Schedules.

1. To-Do List: A to-do list is a great starting point for organizing your day, but not just by writing down every task you can think of. It is a specialized list that helps you focus on what needs to be done.

As you make your list, prioritize your tasks, labeling them with letters from A to E.[161] "A" represents the most important tasks, and "E" represents the least important. If you have multiple tasks of equal importance, use numbers (A1, A2, etc.) to differentiate them.

Complete "A" tasks first. These are your First 3 Things and other priority tasks. Then, move on to "B," "C," and so on. This ensures you are tackling critical tasks first, instead of getting bogged down by less important tasks.

---

[159] These are my categories, based on research and personal experience

[160] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List#Kinds_of_lists

[161] Brian Tracy, "Eat That Frog", 2017, Chapter 6

2. Reminders List:[162] For tasks without deadlines. A reminders list (I also like to call them "Working On…" lists) is a simple tool for keeping track of tasks that do not have an immediate deadline. These can be personal goals, projects, or other not urgent, unimportant tasks. They should be low-priority and low-stress. Keep them separate from your to-do list.

Create your reminders list at the beginning of each week, month, and year. Move tasks from long-term to short-term lists as they become more immediate. These tasks can be flexible and worked on as time allows. For example, instead of saying "clean the garage," say "work on the garage." This language gives you more flexibility.

3. Checklists: Streamlining complex tasks. A checklist is a formalized list designed to reduce errors, especially in complex tasks.[163] You might use a checklist for a specific process, like following a recipe, or for a series of tasks that need to be done in a certain order.

Here are a few types of checklists:[164]

Standard Procedure Lists: These are step-by-step guides for tasks you or others perform regularly. They can be very detailed or simple, depending on how familiar you are with the process or procedure.

Project Checklists: For team-based tasks, each person might have their own checklist, and the manager oversees a master list to keep everything coordinated.

Troubleshooting Checklists: Used to diagnose issues or manage emergencies. These are especially helpful in stressful situations because they give you a structured approach to resolving problems.

Decision-Making Checklists: When faced with a big decision, a checklist can help reduce emotional bias and ensure you weigh all the options logically.

Periodic Checklists: These are for tasks that need to be done regularly, like maintenance or working toward long-term goals. They can be used for things like taking medications or tracking progress on a project.

The key to useful checklists is that they must be written down or printed out. Unwritten or memorized checklists are no more effective than having no checklist at all.[165]

4. Schedules: Making Time for What Matters. A schedule is your roadmap for the day, week, month, or even year. It's a timeline that places your tasks in a time-specific order, ensuring you stay on track toward your goals. Whether you are managing short-term or long-term goals, a schedule helps bring consistency and predictability to your life.

---

162 Adapted from "Planning Lists": Brian Tracy, "Eat That Frog", Blinkist Summary
163 Atul Gawande, "The Checklist Manifesto", 2009, p33
164 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Checklist#Types
165 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Checklist#Effectiveness_of_checklists

Adapt your schedule as necessary. If you are not used to having a schedule, start small and build up to longer-term planning. Over time, you will find that scheduling gives you a sense of control and improves your productivity.

If you feel like scheduling makes your day too predictable or boring, remember that consistency is a key to success. A well-planned day is a productive day, and the more you schedule, the more you will accomplish.

Using Lists for Productivity

These lists will streamline your life and increase productivity and effectiveness. Reserve your to-do list for priority tasks, a reminders list for low-priority items, and checklists for standardized or complex tasks. Combine these tools with a flexible schedule, and you will find that managing your time and tasks becomes easier and less stressful.

Tools

Do or do not. There is no try. --Yoda

I have three essential tools to help streamline your activities and overcome obstacles: WOOP, a science-backed method for setting and achieving goals; Problem-Solving, a structured approach to identifying and resolving problems; and Decision-Making, the process of choosing the best course of action among alternatives. By mastering these tools, you can turn intentions into results and make choices that align with your values and priorities.

Know[3.2-37] WOOP[166]

Have you ever set a goal, felt excited about it, and then watched that motivation fade away? Maybe life got in the way, or self-doubt crept in. If you have struggled with following through on goals, the WOOP method might be exactly what you need.

I am dazzled by WOOP as a standalone process, but also as an enhancement for other tools. From the acronym to the process itself, it adds a bit of fun to a serious undertaking. WOOP was developed by professor of psychology Gabriele Oettingen.[167]

WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) is a simple but powerful mental strategy designed to help you turn dreams into actionable steps. WOOP is backed by research in motivation and behavior change. Unlike simple positive thinking, which can sometimes lead to complacency, WOOP helps you anticipate obstacles and create concrete plans to overcome them.

Step 1: Wish - Define Your Goal. Start by choosing a meaningful and realistic goal. This could be anything from improving your health, completing a project, or developing a new habit. Your wish should be specific and something that truly matters to you.

Ask yourself: What do I really want to accomplish?
Example: You want to exercise more regularly.

---

[166] https://woopmylife.org/en/home
[167] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriele_Oettingen

Step 2: Outcome - Visualize Success. Next, imagine the best possible outcome of achieving your goal. What does success look like? How will you feel when you accomplish it? Visualize the process of working toward your goal, not that you have already achieved it. This is contrary to the "law of attraction",[168] which recommends thinking of your goal as something that has already happened[169] (a kind of "magical thinking")[170]. Be realistic and practical in your visualization.

Success is more likely when you visualize yourself working toward your goal.[171] If you fantasize that you already achieved it, you have no reason to work for it. Your wish should be "challenging… but you should feel it is possible…".[172]

Ask yourself: If I achieve my goal, what's the best possible result?
Example: Imagine yourself living a healthy lifestyle.

Step 3: Obstacle - Identify What Might Hold You Back. This step is extremely important. Instead of ignoring potential roadblocks, WOOP helps you confront them. What internal or external challenges might get in your way? These could be habits, emotions, distractions, or roadblocks.

Ask yourself: What might prevent me from reaching my goal?
Example: You realize that after a long day at work, you often feel too tired or unmotivated to exercise.

Step 4: Plan - Create an If-Then Strategy. Now, prepare for those obstacles by creating a concrete plan. Use the if-then format to anticipate challenges and decide how you will respond. By having a plan in place, you remove uncertainty and make it easier to take action.

Ask yourself: What will I do when I face this obstacle?
Example: If I feel too tired after work, then I will put on my workout clothes immediately and do just five minutes of exercise to get started.

The details of an If-Then strategy are also called "Implementation Intentions". Review your implementation intentions as part of your Daily Routine. Implementation intentions work best when:[173]

Strong intentions already exist.
Intentions are intrinsically (internally) motivated.
Some obstacles exist.
No other current plan exists.
The risk of forgetting to act is high.
The timeline for action is finite.
Planning would cause resistance to your goals.

---

[168] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_(Byrne_book)
[169] Napoleon Hill, "Think and Grow Rich", 1937; Reading this book caused me a lot of problems when I jumped on the manifestation bandwagon. Although I adapted the invisible counselors technique from Chap 14 for my own practice of Inner Focus, I disagree with the book's major premise.
[170] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magical_thinking
[171] Jeremy Dean, "Making Habits, Breaking Habits", 2013, Chap 9
[172] From the WOOP Kit: https://woopmylife.org/en/practice
[173] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Implementation_intention

There is a specific future time for action.
You can think specifically about implementation details.
There are opportunities to share plans publicly.
Planning for single rather than multiple goals.
There is a low likelihood for unanticipated moments for action.

WOOP combines positive thinking with practical problem-solving to boost motivation, improve decision-making, and support lasting behavior change. You can use it to break bad habits, increase productivity, or strengthen relationships. Writing down your WOOP steps helps you stay focused and prepared. This method turns wishes into action, helping you tackle fears, procrastination, and other obstacles.

Know[3.2-38] SMARTER Goals

Goals are more effective when they direct you toward what you want, rather than avoiding what you do not want.[174] For example, which of these two goals are you more likely to achieve: "quit smoking" or "live healthy"? To "quit smoking", you remind yourself of cigarettes every time you think about your goal. The same for losing weight. What do you think of when you say to yourself, "I will stop eating chocolate cake?" But when your goal is to "live healthy" you only remind yourself of healthy habits. Instead of avoiding a negative, you are moving toward a positive.

"SMARTER" is a mnemonic tool used in goal formation.[175] It is not a magic formula. It is only as effective as your understanding of the situation.[176] So, the better you understand your own needs, wants, and limitations, as well as the requirements of achieving your goals, the more effective you will be.

There are various acronyms similar to SMARTER,[177] this is the one I prefer. In an acronym, each letter is a reminder of a word or phrase. When you formulate your goals, use the acronym as a checklist to make sure they are realistic and achievable, and fit your particular mindset and life style:

Specific: Describe your goal in simple, clear statements, describing the needs or values you are working toward. Remind yourself of your goal often as part of your daily routine. (See Creating a Daily Routine p. 244)

Measurable: Measure steps to your goal, as well as the goal itself. Be specific. Use numbers or certifiable events, such as saving $100/month, or spending one full evening with your family every week.

Attainable: Be realistic. This is not "manifesting",[178] it is focusing on reasonable goals you can achieve through your effort and talents.

Relevant: Make sure your goals align with your values. This will save you wasted time and heartbreak. (See Values Clarification p. 166)

---

174 Aaron Price, " The Low Attention Span Guide To Motivation", www.compersionhypnotherapy.com (Website no longer available)
175 https://opexmanagers.com/2021/07/09/smarter-goals-examples/
176 Anthony M. Grant, An integrated model of goal-focused coaching: An evidence-based framework for teaching and practice
177 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria#Current_definitions
178 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifestation_(popular_psychology)

Timely: Develop a realistic timeline. "Someday" is not realistic. Create checkpoints for interim weeks or months moving toward your goal. Set deadlines. You can adjust them, but they will help keep you on track.

Evaluable: Continuously evaluate your goals and progress. Adjust your efforts if you are behind, lose focus, or your goals change. Evaluation is a constant process. It provides feedback to keep you on track.

Revisable: Be fluid and flexible. Missing a deadline is a setback, not failure. Misjudging a situation is a learning experience. Redefine your goals or plans as necessary to move forward.

Know[3.2-39] Reverse Goal Setting[179]

There is an interesting alternative to conventional goal seeking. It involves changing your mindset. Instead of working toward a certain goal, you figure out what kind of person could achieve that goal, and then become that person. It reframes the process of working toward a goal. Follow these steps:

1. Define your SMARTER goal.

2. Imagine the ideal person who could achieve your goal. Be specific in exactly what skills or experience you need to become that person.

3. Evaluate your current situation. Working backward from step 2, determine the actions necessary to gaining the skills you need.

4. List all the obstacles that stand in your way, including personal issues.

5. Create and implement a detailed and specific plan.

Although the desired outcome is the same (achieving your goal), approaching it with this mindset takes off some of the pressure. You, yourself, become the immediate focus of your efforts, rather than some distant achievement you may find difficult to imagine.

Problem Solving

If I had an hour to solve a problem, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.

--Albert Einstein

Problem Solving: The Problem

When you are at a point where your internal state (needs, desires, or expectations) is not in harmony with your external state (reality, or your perception of it), you consider yourself to have a problem to solve, decision to make, or situation to change. I call this, "The Problem", and define it as:[180]

The Problem: *a misalignment or discrepancy between your aspirations and your experience of reality, or reality itself. It may be internal, external, extraneous, or a combination of all of these.*

---

[179] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq1x659j8mA&list=WL&index=2

[180] Based on: https://www.udemy.com/course/recontruct-your-mental-health-as-a-human-being/learn/lecture/38162728

You may not be accustomed to thinking of problems this way, especially if you are an emotional or intuitive thinker. But life can be complicated, as can the problems that arise from it. Therefore, the methods used to define those problems may be complicated, as well. But you can break it down into three bite-size chunks:

1. A problem is a gap between what you have and what you want.
2. There are three types of problems.
3. Every problem has three parts.

Now, a little more detail.

Know[3.2-40] A problem is a gap between what you have and what you want.

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.

--Soren Kierkegaard

Think about past challenges, decisions, and periods of personal growth. You thought of your problem as something you wanted or needed, but did not have. Maybe you did not have enough money, or you wanted a promotion at work, or as a child, you wanted a new toy. These are examples of wanting something you do not have.

On the other hand, your problem may have been something you had, but did not want. Maybe you had an argument with a loved one, or you were sick, or had a run of bad luck. You wanted, instead, to be loved, healthy, and have good things come your way.

So, The Problem is not what you want but do not have. Nor is The Problem what you have but do not want. The Problem is the gap between them. It is this gap that must be addressed. By shifting focus from what is lacking or unwanted to the gap itself, new perspectives and possibilities emerge. Change your viewpoint, and you change the world.

Know[3.2-41] There are three types of problems.

Epictetus[181] tells us that some things are in our power, and others are not. This ancient Stoic wisdom, nearly 2000 years old, tells us which problems are worth our effort and which are not. (See The Enchiridion p. 656)

Such an approach provides guidance on which problems are solvable, and which problems cannot be solved or even clearly understood. Having this clarity can save you tremendous time, energy, and emotional investment.

Type 1: (Internal or Personal) problems are related to your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. They include issues such as low self-esteem, anxiety, unproductive thinking, and unhealthy habits. Type 1 problems often require self-reflection and personal growth to overcome. They significantly affect your well-being, health, relationships, and quality of life.

---

[181] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epictetus

Type 2: (External, Objective, or Nuts and Bolts) problems are tangible. They can be objectively identified and described. They may involve financial difficulties, mechanical or technical problems, or work-related challenges. Type 2 problems require practical problem-solving skills and may require changes in yourself or your environment.

Type 3: (Extraneous, 3rd Party, Constructed, or Unsolvable) problems are usually beyond your control and involve factors that you cannot immediately influence or may not fully understand. These issues range from another individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior, to social problems, global crises, and subjects of a metaphysical nature.

In a nutshell, you have the most influence over the personal or internal problems of your thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Type 1). This is not to imply that they are easy, but that you, and only you, can address them. Next are external, real-life problems (Type 2). These are usually things you can see, touch, and measure. Finally, you might take on problems that you can never completely solve, fix, or understand (Type 3). Taking responsibility for these problems leads to frustration and heartache.

You cannot fix another person's behavior, or individually solve cultural or global problems society sets before you. You can only solve your part of each problem, however large or small that might be. You can put the world down… you do not have to carry it by yourself anymore.

Know[3.2-42] Every problem has three parts.[182]

The three parts of a problem are:

Your aspirations: what you want, need, or expect.
Your perception of the situation.
Reality itself; what the situation actually is.

Part 1: Your aspirations are what you want, need, or expect. Your wants, needs, beliefs, and expectations color and filter everything you think, do, and experience. Regardless of your assumptions, it is extremely likely that at least part of the problem, and often a large part, is internal to you. Failing to recognize this part of The Problem virtually guarantees that you will never completely solve it. (See The Enchiridion p. 656)

Part 2: Your experience of reality and your perception of the situation determine your reaction to it. If your thinking is distorted or if your feelings are inappropriate, your behavior reflects that. Clear thinking and emotional balance allow you to perceive and accept reality as it is. This eliminates wasted efforts to fix issues and solve problems that may not exist, or that you create for yourself. (See Mind p. 389; Emotion p. 345)

Part 3: Reality is seeing the situation as it actually is. Humans inevitably filter reality through their own beliefs and biases. Being human, you are not exempt. But the more honestly and clearly you can bring yourself to see reality, the more likely you are to solve The Problem, whatever it might be. Sometimes, the problem itself is just a misinterpretation of reality.

---

[182] Based on Part 1: Foundation, Four Simple Ideas

Think of the three parts of a problem as tuning knobs on a delicate scientific instrument. It is likely that every problem you face has at least some aspect of all three parts. It is up to you to "tune in" on which parts of the problem you can solve, and which parts you must live with, at least for now.

Many problems you agonize over are not problems at all, in the conventional sense. A lot of them are misperceptions of reality, thinking errors, or issues over which you have no control. That is why it is so helpful to examine every problem more closely.

Examine the Problem

Once you have stated your problem, answer the following questions. Only then should you begin to apply conventional problem-solving methods.

1. The Problem: What is the gap between what I have and what I want?
2. Type 1: Is this problem internal or personal to me?
3. Type 2: Is this problem something in my control that I can fix?
4. Type 3: Is this a problem I understand, and is it my problem?
5. Part 1: Aspirations-Is the problem related to my wants and needs?
6. Part 2: Perceptions-Which parts of the problem may or may not be true?
7. Part 3: Reality-What can I see, measure, and prove is real about it?

Know[3.2-43] Problem Solving: The Solution

After the rather extended introduction to examining and defining your problem, ask yourself these three simple questions before continuing:

1. Is this problem, or part of this problem, within my control?
2. Do I understand the problem?
3. Is this my problem?

If you say "no" to even one of these questions, then conventional problem-solving methods will not work. In that case, you must approach the problem in some other manner, gather more information, wait for the situation to evolve, or redefine it. If you answered "yes" to all three of the questions, then continue.

Know[3.2-44] Problem Solving: A Hybrid Problem Solving System

Solving complex problems requires a structured approach that identifies the real issue, prioritizes major factors, and ensures a lasting solution. A hybrid system combining multiple methods offers a powerful way to tackle challenges efficiently with less stress. (See Stress Management p. 256)

This system integrates three problem-solving techniques: IDEAL (an acronym for Identify, Define, Explore, Act, Look back and Learn) provides step-by-step structure.[183] The 5 Whys helps uncover the root cause by digging deeper into the issue.[184] Pareto Analysis prioritizes the biggest contributors to the problem, ensuring maximum impact with minimal effort.[185] (See 5 Whys p. 343; Pareto Principle p. 220)

---

[183] Bransford and Steine, "IDEAL Problem Solver", 1984

[184] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_whys

[185] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto_principle

3.2 Doing

These tools work for any problem as long as they fit the general criteria listed above. You will find it helpful to practice using the tools on all sorts of real and simulated problems. Problem solving books and AI generated problems are great for this. To see the process in action, I will apply it to an example of a warehouse shipping delay problem.

1. Identify the Problem (IDEAL - Identify): A warehouse receives frequent customer complaints about late deliveries. Data shows delays occur both before and after shipping.

2. Define the Desired Outcome (IDEAL - Define): The goal is to reduce complaints by 90%. Success means orders leave the warehouse within 24 hours and deliveries arrive on time 95% of the time.

3. Analyze the Root Cause (5 Whys Method): To find the real issue, we apply the 5 Whys:

Why are shipments late? Orders take too long to leave the warehouse.
Why does packing take so long? Not enough staff during peak hours.
Why is staffing inadequate? Shift schedules do not match order volume.
Why are schedules fixed? No demand-based scheduling system.
Why is there no system? Lack of real-time tracking.

Root Cause: No real-time tracking for warehouse processing time.

4. Prioritize Issues (Pareto Analysis)

Not all delays are equal. Data analysis shows:
60% of delays happen before shipping due to warehouse bottlenecks.
30% of delays occur during transit because of shipping company issues.
10% of delays are miscellaneous issues.

Therefore, fixing warehouse processing will have the greatest impact.

5. Explore Solutions (IDEAL - Explore)

Possible fixes include:
Implementing a warehouse tracking system to monitor processing times.
Adjusting staffing schedules based on peak demand.
Testing an alternative shipping method for local deliveries.

6. Act on the Best Solution (IDEAL - Act)

A trial warehouse tracking system is introduced for one month, and staffing schedules are adjusted accordingly.

7. Look back and Learn (IDEAL – Look back and Learn)

Data is reviewed:
Did warehouse processing time decrease?
Did customer complaints drop?
If problems persist, repeat 5 Whys and refine the solution.
If successful, expand the tracking system and consider addressing shipping delays next.

Why This Hybrid Method Works

IDEAL provides a structured process for solving the problem.
5 Whys ensures you solve the real issue, not just the symptoms.
Pareto Analysis ensures you focus on the biggest impact areas.

This method ensures a logical, efficient, and data-driven approach to solving problems. By following it, you can identify root causes, prioritize effectively, and implement solutions.

Decision Making

You grapple with countless decisions every day. The time spent on trivial decisions may seem inconsequential, but it saps your energy.[186] By adopting decision making strategies and mindsets, you make better decisions, giving you more time and attention for other things.

However, no matter how careful you are, you will never know with certainty the outcome of your decisions. Accept that you will always experience some level of uncertainty. Flexibility and resilience are vital because they enable you to adapt when unforeseen circumstances arise.

Know[3.2-45] Seven Step Decision Making Guide[187]

1. Outline the goal and outcome: Clearly define the decision that needs to be made. Articulate the goal or decision in specific terms so that there is no ambiguity. You can do this by answering the 5 W's:[188]

What do I want to achieve or change?
Why is this important to me?
Who is affected by this decision?
When does a decision have to be made?
Where will the change take place (i.e. self, work, relationship)?

You can combine these into a single statement: I want to [what] by [when]; this will affect [who], and needs to happen [where].

2. Gather data. You cannot make a clear decision without facts, so do not skimp on this step. Do not assume you already know everything you need to make a good decision. Gather data explicitly and consciously in order not to miss anything important. You can use 4 Lenses:[189]

Facts and Evidence: What do you know for sure? What is actually happening? Look at real-world data: numbers, dates, results, records, symptoms, time spent, and so on. Avoid any guesses or assumptions.

Logic and Reasoning: What makes sense based on what you know? Think about cause and effect. What patterns do you notice? What past decisions had similar circumstances? What conclusions are reasonable?

---

[186] en.wikipeida.org/wiki/Decision_fatigue
[187] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision-making
[188] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ws
[189] The "Four Lenses" approach draws on ideas from leadership, psychology, and reflective thinking. Adapted with assistance from ChatGPT, OpenAI, 2025.

Emotions and Intuition: How do you feel about the situation? Notice stress, excitement, resistance, or relief. Feelings are not facts, but they are data. They often point toward possible unmet needs or unspoken concerns.

> *We are not thinking machines that feel, we are feeling machines that think.*
>
> --Antonio R. Damasio, "Descartes' Error", 1994

Outside Perspective: What would a wise person say if I explained this to them? You can ask someone you trust, or how someone neutral might see it. This helps uncover blind spots and challenges one-sided thinking. (See Invisible Counselors p. 411)

3. Develop Alternatives.

Now that you understand the situation and what you want to achieve, it's time to explore possible options. This is the creative step. You are not trying to pick the best answer yet, just generating as many ideas as possible. The more alternatives you list, the more likely you are to find one that works.

Here are some helpful techniques to develop alternatives:

Brainstorm: Write down every option that comes to mind, no matter how wild or unrealistic it seems. Do not judge or filter your ideas, just get them out of your head and onto the page. You can refine them later.

Add Constraints: Ironically, adding limits can spark creativity. Constraints can help you think in new directions. Ask yourself questions, such as those following, and add your own constraints.

What could I do if I had no money?
What if I had to make a decision today?
What is the smallest step I could take?

List of 100: Push yourself to write a list of 100 possible actions or ideas. It's okay if some are silly or repetitive. The goal is to get past the obvious and dig into your deeper imagination. You will often find gold after idea #30 or #40. (See Journaling Methods p. 311)

Mind Mapping: Start with a central word or idea in the middle of the page, like your goal or your challenge. Then draw branches that show related ideas, options, or possibilities. Keep expanding outward. This technique helps you visually explore connections you might not see in a straight list. (See Journaling Methods p. 311)

SCAMPER: a checklist of creative prompts to help you look at a situation:

Substitute: What can I replace or switch out?
Combine: Can I merge two ideas or actions?
Adapt: What could I borrow or modify from another area?
Modify/Magnify/Minimize: What can I change, and in what way?
Put to another use: Can I repurpose something I already have or know?
Eliminate: What can I remove to simplify the situation?
Reverse or Rearrange: What if I flipped the order or did the opposite?

Use any of these techniques, or combine them, to build a list of alternatives. Do not worry about making a decision yet, that comes next.

4. List Pros and Cons of Each Alternative.

Now that you have your options, it is time to weigh them out. This step is not just making a list, but thinking from multiple angles.

Technique 1: With the Six Thinking Hats, look at each option from six different perspectives (facts, feelings, risks, benefits, creativity, and overall process) to gain a well-rounded view before deciding:[190]

White Hat (Facts): What do I know? What data supports this?
Red Hat (Feelings): How do I feel about this option?
Black Hat (Caution): What could go wrong? What are the risks?
Yellow Hat (Optimism): What could go right? What are the benefits?
Green Hat (Creativity): Is there a new way to do this? Can I combine ideas?
Blue Hat (Process): Am I thinking clearly? Do I need more time or data?

Technique 2: Check for Biases - Before you get too attached to an option, ask yourself these questions: (See Thinking Errors p. 318)

Am I only seeing what supports my favorite idea? (Confirmation bias)
Am I holding onto a past investment? (Sunk cost fallacy)
Am I choosing what is familiar or easy? (Status quo bias)
Am I choosing comfort over long-term impact? (Present bias)
Am I assuming this will go like last time? (Availability bias)

Technique 3: Weighted Decision Table[191]
If you want to compare options more analytically:

List your options in rows.
List important criteria (cost, time, impact, values, etc.) in columns.
Rate each option on each criterion using a consistent scale (1 to 5).
Add up the totals and see what stands out.

This technique works best when you have a few solid options and want a clearer view of how they compare. From my personal experience of bad decisions, do not "over weigh" options that you find more appealing.

5. Make the Decision

Now it is time to choose. Even with good information, decisions can still feel difficult or uncertain. These mental tools help you move forward with confidence:[192]

Uphill Decisions: When faced with two equally difficult choices, choose the one that feels more painful in the short term. This helps counter the natural tendency to overvalue short-term comfort and avoid long-term benefits.

---

190 Edward De Bono, "Six Thinking Hats", 1985
191 https://airfocus.com/blog/weighted-decision-matrix-prioritization/
192 https://gurwinder.substack.com/p/overchoice-and-how-to-avoid-it is the source for: Uphill Decisions, Solomon's Paradox, Hesitation Heuristic, Regret Minimization

Solomon's Paradox: When you are stuck, imagine you are making the decision for a friend. Taking an outside perspective helps reduce emotional bias and brings greater clarity.

Hesitation Heuristic: If you are hesitating, especially about spending time or money, the answer may be "no." But when the decision involves your values, growth, or integrity, "yes" is often the right answer. Pre-set mental guidelines can make decisions easier. I have a guideline, "Does this concern a quality-of-life issue, such as health, relationships, or peace of mind?"

Regret Minimization: Picture your future self and ask: "What choice would I most regret in 10 minutes, 10 months, and 10 years?" This approach supports long-term thinking over short-term emotion.

6. Immediately take action to implement it.

Once you have made your decision, take immediate action, no matter how small. Action builds momentum, reduces doubt, and shifts your mindset from thinking to doing. Even a single step, like sending a message, setting a date, or writing a commitment down, can lock the decision into motion. Delay invites hesitation, second-guessing, and indecision. Do not wait for perfect conditions. Begin now, with what you have, and adjust as you go. Here are some tools to help you:

Micro-Commitments:[193] Break the decision into the smallest possible action you can do *right now*. For example: send a message, set a reminder, schedule a meeting, write a single sentence. Small wins get you moving.

Implementation Intentions: Use the formula: *"If [situation], then I will [action]."* Example: "If I feel overwhelmed tomorrow morning, then I will take a 10-minute walk before starting work." This ties the decision to real-world triggers. (See Grit p. 196; WOOP p. 231)

The 5-Second Rule:[194] Count down - "5, 4, 3, 2, 1" - and then *move*. This simple trick interrupts hesitation and gives your brain a small jolt to act before fear or doubt kicks in.

The Two-Minute Rule:[195] If the action will take less than two minutes, do it immediately. Do not schedule it, organize it, or put it on a list, just do it now.

Public Accountability: Tell someone what you have decided and what you plan to do next. A simple text or conversation can create gentle pressure and added commitment.

7. Learn and reflect on the decision.

Every decision is an opportunity to learn, whether it turns out the way you hoped or not. Once the action is taken and the results are apparent, take time to reflect. Ask yourself what went well, what surprised you, and what you might do differently next time.

---

[193] BJ Fogg Ph.D, "Tiny Habits", 2020, Blinkist Summary
[194] Mel Robbins, "The 5-Second Rule", 2017
[195] David Allen, "Getting Things Done", 2001

Reflection helps you build self-trust, improve your judgment, and refine your decision-making process for the future. Even so-called "mistakes" are valuable if you learn from them. This is where growth happens.

Keep a journal, talk it through with a friend, or simply pause and think. The key is to look back with curiosity, not criticism. You are not just learning what to decide, you are learning how to decide.

Engagement

Engagement is where effort meets reality. It is the point of contact between your inner qualities and the outer world. At this stage, you have reflected on your personal traits, considered your resources, and explored various tools. Engagement brings all of those together in real-world action. There are two parts of engagement: Environment and Creating a Daily Routine.

Environment

People do not begin from the same place. Some individuals are fortunate to live in safety, surrounded by support, stability, and opportunity. Others begin in difficulty, perhaps in environments marked by chaos, instability, or pain. These differences may not always be visible to others, but they are real, and they matter. They shape what change looks like, how it begins, and how quickly or slowly it may unfold.

Your starting point is not your fault (or to your credit). You are not responsible for the circumstances you were born into, or the conditions others may have created. But you are fully responsible for what you do with what you have now. That truth sometimes calls for courage and resolve. It requires honesty, and a willingness to act even when conditions are not ideal. If your environment is less than salutary to your efforts, you can do two things: adapt to it, and then change it.

Adaptation is the first movement of engagement. It is the practice of working with your current environment as it is. That may mean protecting your time in a noisy household, finding a place of focus in the middle of distraction, or simply identifying one small action that is possible today.

Change comes through time and effort. The environment can shift, even if slowly. Consistent action, clearing a space, asking for support, or making deliberate choices, can gradually reshape your surroundings. Some changes may be external, others internal, but all begin with conscious engagement.

Acknowledging your environment is not an excuse for giving up. It is a realistic starting point. It means you are willing to see things as they are, without denial or self-pity. By recognizing your living conditions, whether they are supportive or difficult, you give yourself the power to respond wisely. You cannot change what you refuse to see. When you begin with an honest assessment of your surroundings, you create the possibility of meaningful action. Stop wasting energy on blame and begin using it to build something better.

Know[3.2-46] Creating a Daily Routine

I can't think my way into a new way of acting; I have to act my way into a new way of thinking. --Leo, AA Member

The purpose of a daily routine is not to trap you in a rigid schedule, but to free you. A spiritually grounded routine disrupts automatic living. It brings intention, awareness, and a sense of the sacred into your day. It keeps you focused, grounded, and connected to your values. It lets you take care of your soul.[196] Without a strong daily rhythm, commitment fades quickly.

Design a routine that works, not one that only looks good on paper. Be flexible. You will not follow it perfectly every day, and that is all right. The goal is not perfection, but consistency. If you miss a day, return to it the next. Adjust it as needed. Do not overthink it.

Like prayer and meditation, a new routine may confuse or even irritate those around you. You can explain that you are trying to live more intentionally. Aim for privacy without secrecy. Be discreet when necessary.

Your daily routine is the practical expression of your values, goals, and needs. Keep that in mind as you create it. I will offer a few suggestions to help you get started, but ultimately, it is yours to shape.

To get started, take a close look at your current routine.[197] On a piece of paper, write "Wake up," at the top. Follow this with every activity that follows, "Shower", "Breakfast", etc. Go through your entire day in detail. The last entry in the list is, "Go to sleep."

Beside each entry, write which of your values that activity supports. This is an easy way to determine if your current routine is working for you. With this information, you can refine your daily routine to support your values and work toward your goals.

The best routine is a simple one: start your day, live your day, end your day. The 12 Steps are a perfect fit into your daily routine, as I will address. Here is an outline for a daily routine:

Daily Routine: Begin Your Day

How you begin your day shapes your day. A simple but powerful habit is to smile and speak to your Higher Power the moment you wake up.[198] Say thank you, or ask for help with any difficulties. It may feel awkward at first, but with practice, this small act sets a positive tone for your entire day.

Add a short prayer built around the Steps. You might say: “Life is unmanageable. Help me to accept what comes today as I continue my journey. I am on Step ____.” Then, affirm your Higher Power’s presence, and name something you are grateful for, something that fills you with awe, and something you are looking forward to.

---

[196] Thomas Moore, "Care of the Soul 25th Anniversary Ed.", 2016

[197] https://www.theemotionmachine.com/make-a-complete-list-of-your-daily-routine/

[198] From Marcelle, AA Member

Next, ask for guidance: "Help me rely on you in all I do." Lastly, state your First 3 Things, your tasks for the day, or your intentions. This Inner Focus strengthens your connection to your Higher Power. If you are running late, it is okay to move this quiet time to later in the day, but do not skip it entirely.

It is also important to know that many successful people share one habit: they begin their day with a solid morning routine.[199] Beyond that, their approaches vary widely. Some start with writing, others with exercise, meditation, or something entirely different.

I suggest, at minimum, make your bed and tidy up your living area. This creates a sense of order and clears your mind.[200] Follow this with basic hygiene and a good breakfast. Add a workout, or at minimum, some stretching, a walk, or other types of movement. This simple routine of self-care sets the tone for the rest of your day. Small, intentional actions help you feel calm, focused, and eager to start your day.

The key is not to follow a specific formula, but to discover what works best for you. The early hours of the day have a powerful influence on everything that follows. Try out different ideas that appeal to you. If something feels right, keep it. If it does not, move on and try something else. With a little patience, you will find a morning rhythm that suits you perfectly and sets the stage for a successful day.

I don't call it a bad day; I call it an off day. --Kelly, AA Member

Daily Routine: Live Your Day

Much of your schedule is set by work, school, family, and other obligations. How you conduct yourself (at all times), and what you do with your remaining free time, is your choice. Living your day well is the foundation of living a good life. Use the tools in the Steps, Knowledge, and Wisdom to improve yourself (and the world). Every day of your life is a Hero's Journey!

Decide which of the tools and areas you want to concentrate on. Here is a short list of recommendations:

Use RaDaR often.
Use prioritized To Do Lists and Reminders Lists.
Keep a bullet list of events, thoughts, and feelings in a notebook or app.
Concentrate on doing the next right thing.
Develop good habits and release bad habits.
Be mindful of your impact on others.
Pray and meditate anytime in your day.
Use your Implementation Intentions. (See Grit p. 196; WOOP p. 231)
Rehearse difficult actions or areas of procrastination. (See Planning p. 220)

Each day is a little life: every waking and rising a little birth, every fresh morning a little youth, every going to rest and sleep a little death.

--Arthur Schopenhauer

---

[199] Spall and Xander, "My Morning Routine", 2018, Blinkist Summary
[200] Shunmyo Masuno, "The Art of Simple Living", 2019, Blinkist Summary

Daily Routine: End your day

A consistent routine at the end of the day strengthens reflection, reinforces values, and improves sleep and emotional balance. Tend to practical requirements and self-care as you did in the morning, and throughout your day. Then, as you began your day with Steps 1, 2, and 3, you end it with Steps 10, 11, and 12. If you kept a bullet journal during the day, it helps focus your thoughts and sort through the day's events.

In your end-of-day inventory, use the questions from Step 10. Then use Step 11 to ask for guidance and perspective, and Step 12 as an opportunity to recognize how you made the world better. A simple prayer is best: "Help me review this day honestly and without fear, grateful for my successes and committed to fixing my mistakes. I take a moment to ask for your guidance, especially about... Today I made the world better by:..."

Do not neglect what you did well during the day. Recalling your successes builds resilience, increases happiness, and reduces stress.[201] You can also rate your day. You may use a simple percentage (such as 86%), or tools like the Self-Rated Wellness Scale or the Satisfaction with Life Scale. And of course, the simplest inventory of all is, "Was today a good day?"

Refining Your Daily Routine

Take care of your body and mind: prioritize sleep, nutrition, exercise, stress management, and fun. Make time for relationships, chores, and self-care. Tailor your routine to your natural rhythms, stay flexible, and adjust as needed. Your routine is a guide, not a rigid rulebook. Think of it as the path you return to, not a prison. It is always a work in progress.

Use your First 3 Things for motivation, not guilt. When I do one of my three things, it is a good day, with two of them, a better day. If I do all three of my First 3 Things, it is a great day! (See Values Clarification p. 166)

Remember these for your Daily Routine points:

Remember your Step work and inventories.
Perform acts of kindness.
Exercise, pray, and reflect.
Have fun and develop social connections.
Take time away from screens.
Restart your day anytime.
Learn from hard days. Even tragedy can yield insight.
Watch for emotional red flags. Ask yourself: “What am I feeling?”
Accept low-energy days.
Rest without guilt, but do not dwell there.
Pray humbly. Accept what you cannot change. Live your values.
Take one positive action now. Big or small, it sets the tone.
Review often. A good day, lived well, builds a good life.

---

[201] Sandberg and Grant, "Option B - Facing Adversity …", 2017

Living Virtuously

Your character, integrity, and work ethic will bring you more in life than anything else.

--Leah McCourt, MMA Fighter

Part way through writing this section, I read a book called "How to Live".[202] It consists of 27 different philosophies of life. Although apparently in conflict, each of these may be appropriate or make sense for some individuals at various points in their life.

Everyone has unique beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors which change over time. How you desire to live is different than mine, and probably different than your own 5 years ago or 5 years in the future.

There is no single best way of Doing. Ultimately, Doing concerns not just getting things done, but how you live. When you live well, everything else falls into place. Therefore, I conclude this section with thoughts on how to live virtuously while Doing.

The following framework combines the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism,[203] Benjamin Franklin's 13 virtues,[204] and others. The goal is not perfection, but progress, a daily effort to live with intention and integrity.

Know[3.2-47] How to Live Virtuously

Right Understanding: See the world clearly and accept reality. Practice humility through reflection, journaling, and honest self-inventory.

Right Intention: Set honest intentions that reflect your values. Begin each day by asking what kind of person you want to be.

Right Speech: Speak truthfully and kindly. Listen well, avoid gossip, and ask, "Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?"

Right Action: Do what aligns with your values. In tough moments, ask what the next right step is. Make amends when needed.

Right Livelihood: Choose work that reflects your values and avoids harm. Look for ways to serve through your efforts.

Right Effort: Stay committed without overdoing it. Focus on progress, not perfection. Practice small virtues consistently.

Right Mindfulness: Be aware of thoughts and feelings without judgment. Pause often to check in with yourself.

Right Concentration: Direct attention to what matters. Use prayer, meditation, and reflection to stay centered and connected.

To summarize, do good and avoid evil in your thoughts and deeds.[205] Do your best. That is all you have to do. That is all you *can* do.

---

[202] Derek Sivers, "How to Live", 2021

[203] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_Eightfold_Path

[204] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin#Thirteen_Virtues

[205] See Wisdom-The Dhamapada, Dham[028], Verse 183

Doing Conclusion

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do... What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. "How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done." These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.

--Alcoholics Anonymous, p85

The practice of Doing is where theory becomes action, where intention meets behavior. It consists of five interconnected parts that help you live intentionally and build a meaningful life. These elements are: You, Time, Tools, Engagement, and Living Virtuously. Each part supports the others and provides structure for living in alignment with your values.

It begins with You, your mindset, habits, and personal values. Who you are shapes how you act. Your level of self-discipline, self-awareness, and resilience all influence your ability to show up consistently. It is not about perfection. It is about showing up honestly and steadily, rooted in integrity. When you take responsibility for yourself, you lay the foundation for meaningful action.

Next is Time, your most precious and limited resource. Everything you do happens within the frame of time. Treat it as a sacred canvas. How you manage your time determines what you create with your life. If you waste it, you lose opportunity. If you use it with intention, you build purpose and stability. This means setting priorities, avoiding distractions, and creating structure for your day.

Tools come next. These are the systems, methods, and techniques that help you stay organized and productive. Journals, planners, habit trackers, RaDaR entries, and personal rituals are all tools. The goal is to refine and use the ones that actually help you act with consistency. Tools do not do the work for you, but they help you reduce friction and support your effort.

With a solid foundation, you move into Engagement, putting knowledge, time, and tools into direct action. This is where most people struggle, because doing often feels awkward, boring, or difficult. But this is where change actually happens. You do the work even when it is inconvenient. You build momentum through repetition, not through inspiration. You do not wait for the right mood; you begin, and let the motivation follow.

Finally, Living Virtuously ties everything together. It is not enough to be productive. You want your life to be good, just, and fulfilling. This means aligning your actions with virtues such as honesty, humility, courage, patience, and compassion. When your daily actions reflect your deepest values, even the smallest task becomes sacred.

'Doing' is suiting up and showing up. --Cheri, AA Member

3.3 Body

To keep the body in good health is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear.

--Buddha

If any thing is sacred, the human body is sacred.

--Walt Whitman

Body Contents

1. About Body 249
2. Truths About Body 250
3. A Plan for Health 251
4. Personal Hygiene 281
5. Illness, Pain, and the End of Life 282

About Body

How you treat your body reflects how you see yourself and your place in the universe. If your body is the temple of your soul, then caring for the soul begins with caring for the body. When your body is strong, you can move, learn, and contribute. When it is weak, you lose energy and motivation.

Popular culture often portrays good health as the product of extreme effort. The focus is on short-term goals, but once those goals are met, you must start over with a new goal. This approach depends heavily on willpower and motivation, and when people fall short, they blame themselves.

But your life is your own, and your body is your responsibility. The past does not matter as much as what you do today. Viewing health one day at a time brings freedom. You stop chasing vague goals like "losing weight" and instead make health a daily value.[1] You focus on what you do now, not what you did yesterday or what you may do tomorrow.

Health is holistic, touching on many areas of life.[2] After presenting you with useful information about your body, I describe "A Plan for Health", four simple areas to guide your efforts: Think, Eat, Sleep, and Move.[3] This plan guides you to work on your health every day. You do not need perfection. You need only to do your best.

Following this easy plan, I focus on two other important subjects: personal hygiene, and the ultimate end and dissolution of your physical body.

---

[1] Dayna Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", 2019, p15

[2] Therese Iknoian, "Mind-Body Fitness for Dummies", 2001, Intro

[3] Although I did not realize it at the time, these categories are similar to the ideas of Steph Gaudreau, "The Core 4", 2019

3.3 Body

Know[3.3-01] **Truths About Your Body**

1. To improve and maintain health, do three things to the best of your ability: eat healthy, exercise regularly, and get sufficient quality sleep.[4] I would also add to the beginning of the list, "think healthy", which means manage stress, refrain from toxic substances, and avoid risky behaviors.

2. Due to lifestyle, two out of three individuals will die from heart disease or cancer, but nine out of ten people could potentially live to the age of 90.[5]

3. Anyone can benefit from physical activity.[6]

4. Regular physical activity may:[7]

Protect your heart.
Help prevent some cancers.
Keep your lungs healthy.
Tone and strengthen your muscles.
Build stamina.
Keep your joints in good condition.
Improve your balance.
Slow bone loss.
Give you more energy.
Help you relax and cope with stress.
Build confidence.
Improve your quality of sleep.
Help guard against depression.

5. Sufficient quality sleep can improve health. Insufficient sleep can cause depression, unhappiness, and irritability.[8]

6. Sleep is as important as any other physical need, like food. You can sleep less than you need, but there will be physical and mental consequences.[9]

7. When you eat a lot of sugar, salt, and fat, it makes you want more sugar, salt, and fat.[10] If you reduce them in your diet, you begin to crave them less.

8. You are what you eat, because your body is literally built using the nutrients you get from what you eat and drink.[11]

9. Nearly everyone, regardless of age or current health status, can improve their health by changing what they eat and drink for better nutrition.[12]

10. Know what is beyond your control and what is not. Inherited disease, the result of accidents, and past lifestyle choices cannot be changed. But you can change how you think, eat, sleep, and move today.

---

4 Tom Rath, "Eat, Move, Sleep", 2013, 12min Summary
5 Ibid.
6 US Gov, "Be Active Your Way", Pdf Document
7 US Gov, "Physical Activity And Your Heart", Pdf Document
8 US Gov, "Your Guide to Healthy Sleep", Pdf Document
9 Rafael Pelayo, M.D., "How to Sleep", 2020, p13
10 Dr. Diana Joy Ostroff, "The Wisdom of Well-Being", 2010
11 Carol Ann Rinzler, "Nutrition for Dummies 7th Ed.", p8
12 US Gov, "Dietary Guidelines for Americans"

Know[3.3-02] The Truth About Your Brain

One last and important truth. In Knowledge-Spirit, I discuss life after death. In Mind, I discuss that you are not your thoughts. In Emotion, you learn that you are not your feelings. But in a practical sense, you are your brain, and your brain is you. At least, in some mysterious way, your brain is the anchor point of your awareness in this physical reality.

Your brain is linked by a complex system of nerves, fluids, and even the microbial biome in your gut to every other organ in your body.[13] And, being a biological organ, if your brain is damaged or malnourished, it ceases to function properly. When your brain malfunctions, it impacts on your quality of life, your sense of yourself, and your awareness of the world around you.

So, if you do not care for your body for any other reason, care for it because that lump of goo inside your skull is where "you" live, at least for now. You may see yourself more as a mental or spiritual person than a physical body. But without the foundation of a healthy brain in a healthy body, your mental and spiritual self may deteriorate as well.

A Plan for Health

Breaking down healthy living to four areas greatly simplifies your approach. It is easier to remember, "Think, eat, sleep, and move," than have a bunch of facts and figures at your fingertips. And, while plenty of those are included in this section, keeping those four ideas in mind makes it much easier to form a healthy mindset.

Think

Perhaps thinking does not seem consistent with other aspects of health, but I assure you it is. Not only that, but I have placed thinking before other health essentials of eating, sleeping, and moving. The reason for this seeming incongruity is quite simple: getting and staying healthy within a modern lifestyle is contrary to your natural instincts. So, to be healthy and stay healthy requires that you think carefully and often about the level of health you want to achieve and maintain.

Why Healthy Is Hard

Sitting on the couch stuffing your face with cookies and chips, you are doing exactly what millions of years of evolution have programmed you to do.[14] The human body existed in its current form long before couches, cookies, and potato chips. Life was simple, if brutal, in those ancient times. Sugar, salt, and fat were high-value nutrients and hard to find.[15] People ate them when available because they did not know when there might be more. If they were not in danger or looking for food, they rested, because saving energy was paramount to survival.

---

[13] Alan Jasanoff, "The Biological Mind", 2018, Blinkist Synopsis

[14] Dayna Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", p9

[15] Ibid.

Fast forward a couple million years, and those finely tuned survival instincts tend to make us lazy and fat. This is true for all of us. Foraging for food is no more difficult than opening the fridge. Running from danger is a fast walk to cross the street.

In modern society, your instincts sometimes run contrary to what may be healthy for you. But you are gifted with a wondrous intellect that can reprogram and repurpose those instincts to your good. That is why "thinking" is the first aspect of health I will discuss.

Know[3.3-03] A Healthy Mindset

You can buy a lot of things in life, but a healthy body isn't one of them. It's something you have to earn through hard work and dedication.

--Claudia Gadelha, Former MMA Fighter

The most effective, life-long approach to good health is by creating and keeping a healthy mindset. Once you have that in place, better health becomes part of your value system and is much easier to implement. If your exercise, sleep, and nutritional needs change with age, injury, or events, your mindset will lead you to adjust accordingly.

With a healthy mindset,[16] you prioritize healthy eating and regular exercise. You get sufficient rest because you know that quality sleep is essential. You have a daily plan that is achievable and realistic. When you get stuck, you recommit to your values and goals. You find ways to manage your stress and relax. You spend time outdoors for the health benefits of nature.

Here are 10 tips to help you develop a healthy mindset:

1. Let ridiculously small changes become habits.[17] Starting with small changes is effortless. It requires no willpower. Changes are "ridiculously small" if they require very little effort and 30 seconds or less to finish. They work precisely because of their ease and simplicity.

Being small and easy fits right in with those finely tuned survival instincts I mentioned earlier. They slip under the radar of your mind that says, "this is too hard", and "I can't do this", precisely because they are short, simple, and easy. Even if you have a health program in place, small changes can help you fine-tune and improve it. (See Habits p. 207)

Ridiculously small changes can kickstart your exercise and nutrition efforts. Examples are:[18]

Do 1 stretch when you wake up.
Do 1 pushup, crunch, or squat during the day.
March in place for 30 seconds in front of your computer or tv.
Eat 1 carrot as a snack.
Drink a glass of water.

---

[16] https://drkellyann.com/blogs/news/13-things-person-healthy-mindset
[17] Maria Brilaki, "Surprisingly Unstuck", 2012, p55
[18] Ibid.

Through ridiculously small changes, you can bypass the resistance of your unconscious mind. Your conscious mind may not make logical sense of it, but small changes create new neural pathways in your brain. They condition your unconscious mind to enjoy positive change.[19]

2. Do not compare yourself with others.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

-- Max Ehrman, "Desiderata"

Many years ago, I went to a gym to start a new exercise program. While I was working at one of the weight machines, a couple of guys (who obviously worked out a lot) were talking. One nodded toward me and said, "li'l man trying to get in shape!" I did not go back to a gym for a long time after that. I should add, though, that such an event only happened once in my life, and by avoiding the gym I only hurt myself.

I recently watched a video discussing the radical transformations of some actors preparing for movie roles.[20] The video makes it clear that most of us should not emulate the health regimen of action stars who play superheroes. Though such transformations are possible for "regular" people, they are unlikely without specialized diets, trainers, and medical supervision.[21]

Comparing yourself to other people is pointless and counterproductive. You are on your journey, and they are on theirs. To make health a life-long endeavor, gauge your progress only against yourself.

3. Create a growth mindset.[22] Having a growth mindset means you believe your skills can be enhanced through learning. With a growth mindset, you embrace challenges and persist in the face of adversity. You place more importance on the process than the outcome. You develop your talents and abilities through practice. You use feedback and failure as opportunities for skill development. Studies show that people with a growth mindset and the willingness to persevere have a greater chance of achieving success.

4. Focus on what you can control.[23] Worrying about things you cannot control leads to anxiety. Concentrate your efforts on problems you can control. If they seem overwhelming, split them into smaller problems.

For example, you cannot change your weight today, but you can control what you eat. You cannot change past health decisions, but you can control your decisions today. You cannot control chronic or hereditary health issues, but you can work on being better today. Accept what you cannot control and prioritize what is important to you. (See The Enchiridion p. 656)

---

[19] Based on Maria Brilaki, "Surprisingly Unstuck", 2012, p56

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7K-0UQeRnY

[21] https://cosmicbook.news/alan-ritchson-admits-testosterone-got-him-jacked-for-reacher-season-2

[22] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindset#Fixed_and_growth_mindset

[23] https://www.kaylaitsines.com/blogs/lifestyle/healthy-mindset#FocusOnWhatYouCanControl

5. Work on healthy relationships and good mental health. You need three levels of connection.[24] For good mental and physical health, you need connections with: your real and authentic self, a power greater than yourself, and other human beings. If you are lacking in any of these areas, your health may ultimately suffer. Consider these areas honestly and decide if you are spending sufficient time on each one. (See Relationships p. 425)

6. Prioritize self-care. I went to my eye doctor for an annual checkup. He found that the pressure in my eyes was nearly double what it should be. I felt no discomfort, but without that checkup and treatment, I would have eventually gone blind.

Taking care of yourself means using all the resources you have available. That includes doctors, dentists, mental health professionals, and anyone else who can support you. Do not waste time worrying about resources you do not have, or what you cannot afford. Use every resource at your disposal.

Sometimes you need to prove to yourself, or remind yourself, that you truly care about yourself. If this is difficult for you, an easy way to start is with a checklist,[25] do you:

Eat regularly, and in a healthy way.
Drink enough water.
Exercise/move every day.
Get enough quality sleep.
Get medical checkups.
Go to the dentist.
Have your vision checked.
Go to the doctor or clinic when you are sick.
Wear comfortable clothes.
Keep good personal hygiene.
Brush and floss your teeth every day.
Take your medications as scheduled.
Talk to someone or ask for help when necessary.
Make your bed, wash your dishes, do your laundry.
Take naps when you are tired.
Pray and meditate for strength and guidance.

7. Do not get caught in the WHY trap. For straight-forward problem solving, asking "why" can be advantageous. But for fuzzy problems like changing your lifestyle and behavior, it gets you nowhere. Asking "why…?" (Why can't I lose weight? Why don't I want to exercise? Why do I eat so much junk food?) is a trap.[26] Some problems cannot be solved in the conventional manner, and changing your behavior is one of them. Instead of asking "why", try finding the quickest solution that gets you back to a healthy lifestyle.

---

[24] Russell Brand, "Recovery", 2019, Step 5
[25] Adapted from: https://www.chronicillnesswarriorlife.com; I added several items.
[26] Dayna Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", p107

8. Outwit avoidance by thinking ahead. If you are tempted by a certain kind of food, do not have that food available. Do not go to the restaurants that serve it, and so on. Develop implementation intentions in advance for your favorite excuses. You can say, "If I am too tired, then I can still do my minimum workout." For eating, "If I think 'I deserve this piece of cake', then I will eat something healthy, instead." You can rehearse these intentions ahead of time. You may feel silly, but pretending you are tired but go to your workout anyway will help when you actually are tired. Pretending you avoid a piece of chocolate cake will help you when you have it in front of you. (See Rehearse the Plan p. 223; Implementation Intentions p. 242)

9. Review your habits. I like going to the gym late because it is less crowded. But that means that I am more likely to be tired when I go. I can solve this problem by re-arranging my schedule, altering my routine, replace my workout with something else, or a combination of these. Ultimately, when your routine bogs down, return to your minimum habits. If you can keep these in place, you will continue to progress. The point is to find solutions for your weak spots. (See Habits p. 207)

10. Recommit with self-compassion. Maintaining healthy habits is difficult. Life gets in the way. But the question is not whether you lose your healthy habits, but how quickly you get them back. View setbacks as a learning experience, and not as a loss or failure. Do not indulge in self-criticism or make empty resolutions. Get back on track as soon as possible. Look for something easy. It can be a symbolic gesture, such as drinking a glass of water or going for a short walk.[27] Find something small and do it *right now*!

Health Cost and Availability

Access to health care and nutrition varies greatly depending on your location and income. Diverse issues such as living conditions, food availability, crime rates, and health care costs, all directly impact your health and lifestyle.

There are people who have little or no control over their health decisions. This is often through no fault of their own. I cannot blithely recommend taking a walk around your neighborhood for exercise when it is not safe to do so. I cannot recommend that you "eat more fruits and vegetables" when there are none to be found.

However, no one can look after your health as well as you can. No government or organization has more of a stake in your personal health and welfare than you do. You are the first and best defender of your physical health. You may not be responsible for your current situation, but you are responsible for safeguarding your health *as best you can.*

Some of the suggestions in this section may seem tone deaf if you cannot afford them or cannot, due to circumstances, try them. But being proactive for your health is a mindset, and the benefits are large. I urge you to adapt as well as possible, and do *whatever you can* to improve and maintain your health. Any improvement is a success! Your life will be better for it.

---

[27] Dayna Lee-Baggley, PhD, "Healthy Habits Suck", p104

Toxic Substances and Risky Behaviors

When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied.

-- Herophilus

The first way to safeguard your health is by avoiding harmful substances and behaviors. Seven of the top ten causes of preventable death are fully or partially in the control of the individual.[28] These were hypertension, smoking tobacco, alcohol use disorder, sexually transmitted disease, poor diet, being overweight or obese, and physical inactivity. If you have a problem in any of these areas and cannot get better, seek professional help. Addressing these issues may increase the length and quality of your life.

Stress Management

An important factor in maintaining health is managing stress. Your mind and immune system are interdependent.[29] Chronic stress makes your immune system less efficient. Lowering your stress level improves your immunity and reduces your chances of illness.

It is important to mentally separate your stressors (the causes of your stress) from the stress itself.[30] A stressor is a situation, event, or thought that causes you stress. Stress is a physiological response to a stressor that has three parts.

Know[3.3-04] Three Parts of Stress Response

1. Perception of a threat
2. A physical response to the threat
3. Release from the threat

When your body does not complete the stress cycle through all three phases, you end up with chronic stress. But you can deal with stress while you solve the problem. You do not have to wait until the situation has passed. For example, financial difficulties are not quickly solved, but the stress that accompanies them can damage your health. So, a component of problem-solving is dealing with stress. (See Problem Solving p. 234)

You can reduce your stress levels by recognizing, understanding, and then managing your stress. While you may think that it is a simple matter to know when you are stressed out, the fact is that you can get used to it. When I was in counseling, objective tests indicated that I was stressed off the scale. And yet, I did not "feel" stressed. I had grown accustomed to it.

In the following pages, I first discuss how to recognize stress. Next, understanding your stress, such as its source and magnitude. Finally, I discuss stress management techniques (since we all experience some stress). These techniques are for immediate relief, long-term management practices, and lifestyle choices that either reduce stress, or reduce its effects.

---

[28] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Preventable_causes_of_death#2001_figures

[29] Jan Garavaglia, M.D., "How Not To Die", p109

[30] https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_nagoski_ and_amelia_nagoski_the_cure_for_burnout_hint_it_isn_t_self_care

Know[3.3-05] Recognizing stress symptoms and triggers.

Knowing what triggers stress is the first step in dealing with it. There are four main sources of stress:[31]

Environmental: weather, noise, traffic, pollution, allergens, crowded conditions, unsafe situations, crime, poor living conditions, and so on.

Social: demands on your time and attention, working conditions, deadlines, interpersonal conflicts, social media. Other serious stressors are the death or illness of loved ones, financial and relationship difficulties.

Physiological: lack of exercise, poor nutrition, and insufficient sleep. Other serious physical stressors are illness, injury, accidents, and aging.

Cognitive: stress reactions are triggered by your interpretations of events. Your thoughts can lead to anxiety and other stress reactions.[32]

The symptoms of stress may include: anxiety, depression, sadness, anger, irritability, social isolation, menstrual problems, abdominal pain, back pain, and difficulty concentrating.[33] Other symptoms are hyperventilation, digestive problems, muscle tensions, teeth grinding, and headaches.

Behavioral symptoms from stress can be: seeking distraction (social media, tv, video games), smoking and tobacco use, increased alcohol consumption, drug use, and changes in your work, sleep and eating patterns.[34]

Look for these common signs of stress:[35]
You always seem to be in a bad mood.
You are not sleeping properly or sleeping more or less than usual.
Changes in your sex drive.
You are more emotional: sad, angry, depressed, overwhelmed.
You get sick more often.
You are overeating or undereating.
You are drinking or drugging to relax.

Stress is a physical reaction that can be expressed through your behavior, emotions, thoughts, and relationships. It is usually an indirect indicator to some event or events causing it. While you can manage stress, you must manage the cause, as well.

Know[3.3-06] Understanding Your Stress Levels.

Ask yourself, "How stressful is this event, exactly?" Estimate your level of stress on a scale of 0 to 10,[36] with zero being no stress, and 10 being extremely stressed. Most of the little stresses you run into every day are not that bad unless you make them that way.

---

31 Martha Davis, PhD, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, MSW, Matthew McKay, PhD, "The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook 7th Edition", 2019, p2-3
32 Joelle Jane Marshall, "Managing Anxiety with Mindfulness for Dummies", Chap 4
33 Ruth C. White, PhD, MPH, MSW, "The Stress Management Workbook", 2018, p19
34 Ruth C. White, PhD, MPH, MSW, "The Stress Management Workbook", 2018, p21
35 https://www.stress.org/7-signs-you-might-be-too-stressed
36 Allen Elkin, PhD, "Stress Management for Dummies, 2nd Ed.", Chap 3

Stress Quiz:[37] Add the numbers for each event that you have experienced in the last year. Scoring instructions follow the list. This list is for adults.

Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Imprisonment	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Dismissal from work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sexual difficulties	39
Gain a new family member	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Change to different line of work	36
Change in frequency of arguments	35
Major mortgage	32
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Child leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse starts or stops work	26
Beginning or end of school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in working hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in schools	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
Minor mortgage or loan	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family reunions	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Major Holiday	12
Minor violation of law	11

Scoring Instructions: Score of 300+: At risk of illness. 150-299: Moderate risk of illness. Less than 150: Slight risk of illness.

---

[37] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holmes_and_Rahe_stress_scale

Stress Diary: To identify your unique stressors, keep a stress diary.[38] Note the date and time, your stress level (0-10), what you were doing, and what you were thinking. Ask yourself 2 questions about each stressor:

Is it important?
Is it under my control?

Let go of the stressors that are not important. Note the ones that are important and over which you have some control. Practice stress management and problem-solving techniques to address them. Use stress management for those that you cannot control.

3. Managing Your Stress

I have divided the stress management tools into three parts: Quick Relief, Practices, and Foundation:[39]

Quick Relief tools are those things you can do immediately when you feel stressed. They will (hopefully) keep you from starting a fight or argument, punching or throwing something, or indulging in self-destructive behavior. They calm you enough so that you do not do something you regret later.

Practices are the things that you, well, "practice." You will see positive results in a fairly short time if you apply yourself. These are mental, emotional, and spiritual practices that help you live well and make the world better.

Foundation includes the fundamental lifestyle habits that may reduce your baseline stress levels. Think about how you would feel if you were less angry, less afraid, and worried less, every day!

Quick Relief

Know[3.3-07] Count to 10:[40] When you feel angry or overwhelmed, simply stop and count to 10, silently or aloud, to give yourself time and the emotional space to compose yourself. If you measure the count with slow, deep, diaphragmatic breaths, you have the added benefit of physically de-stressing. (See Diaphragmatic Breathing p. 394)

Know[3.3-08] Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques work fast because they alter your physiology immediately. When stress hits, your body shifts into fight-or-flight mode, driving up your heart rate and forcing rapid, shallow breaths. Taking control of your respiration breaks that automatic loop.

Slow, deep exhales stimulate the vagus nerve, which signals your brain to lower your heart rate and release the physical tension held in your muscles. Breathing practice gives you an instant, practical tool to calm your mind and regain steady focus when you are stressed. (See Core Practices and Techniques p. 394)

---

[38] U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, "Manage Stress Workbook"
[39] Format roughly based on Elizabeth Anne Scott, "8 Keys to Stress Management"
[40] Elizabeth Anne Scott, "8 Keys to Stress Management"

Know[3.3-09] Do something physical: For stress relief, any type of physical exercise will do. After ensuring you are physically safe and capable of exercise, you can do jumping jacks in place, walk around the block, or tense and relax groups of muscles.[41] Do any type of physical activity that you prefer and is safe for you to do, given your location, situation, and health. It is important to engage in this physical activity immediately, while you are feeling stressed, to complete the stress cycle.

Know[3.3-10] RaDaR: Reflect, Describe, Respond (RaDaR). Use RaDaR to examine your stress and respond in accordance with your values and the will of your Higher Power. (See pages 116, 218, 260, 306, 384, 447, 788)

If you have ever been startled watching a scary movie, you may have suddenly "jumped". This physiological reaction is called "hyperarousal", "acute stress response", or "fight, flight, freeze."[42] But when you remembered it was just a movie, you instantly relaxed. Maybe you laughed as the tension eased. This example illustrates two things:

Your body cannot always interpret if an event represents actual danger. Your mind can override and shut down the stress response.

Reflect: Stress is often associated with fear and anger,[43] two emotions that do not lend themselves to easy examination. But if you can put some space between yourself and the stressor (through the techniques described above), you may find that you are causing yourself more stress than is necessary.

Describe: If an event, person, or situation is causing you immediate or severe stress, try to examine it in a rational way:

What kind of issue is it? Emotional, physical, relationship…?
What would you say to a friend in the same situation?
What advice would you get from the wisest person you know?
What are your precise feelings?
Have you faced this issue before, or something like it?
Is it long-term or short-term?
Is it important? Will it matter in a month? A year? 5 years?
Is it worth risking your health to worry about it?
Is it worth your peace and serenity to worry or be angry about it?
How much control do you have over the outcome?
What is the worst possible outcome, and can you prepare for that?
Has anyone else ever had the same problem?
Do you have a reason or need for this stressor in your life?
Can you reframe the situation to reduce stress?

Respond: After careful examination, you may see that your stress is unwarranted. This will help you put it in proper perspective. However, you may decide that this stressor is not easily dealt with, or is not a short-term problem. You can then make a proactive decision on what to do next.

---

[41] https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_nagoski_and_amelia_nagoski_the_cure_for_burnout_hint_it_isn_t_self_care/transcript

[42] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight-or-flight_response

[43] Ruth C. White, PhD, MPH, MSW, "The Stress Management Workbook", 2018, p20

Know[3.3-11] Stress Management: Practices

Relaxation exercises can change your brain waves.[44] The goal of relaxation is to trigger the parasympathetic nervous system. This autonomic system allows your body to digest food, enable immune responses, heal wounds, and perform other types of health maintenance.[45] It is the natural physical state of your body. Because stress turns the parasympathetic nervous system off, chronic stress can cause slow healing, digestive problems, low immune response, and other health problems. It is an uncomfortable, disruptive feeling that reduces your ability to live a good life.

> *There is no shame in not being okay... but the healing is your responsibility.*
>
> --Kat Timpf

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation was developed by Dr. Edmund Jacobsen.[46] It is the most popular relaxation technique used in the United States. It involves tensing and releasing various muscle groups to train yourself on the contrasting sensations of tension and relaxation. The procedure for progressive muscle relaxation is simple[47]:

Here is a condensed guide for progressive muscle relaxation. Perform these 2-3 times, slowly and gently.

Safety: Use only about two-thirds effort when tensing. Never tighten muscles that are injured or in pain. If you feel unexpected pain, stop. Do not use this practice while driving or operating equipment.

Technique: Tense a muscle group for 6-10 seconds, focusing on the sensation. Release instantly, like cutting a string, and let the relaxation deepen for 10-15 seconds. Let relaxation happen rather than trying to force it.

Breathe: Take deep, diaphragmatic breaths; hold briefly, then exhale fully.
Face: Frown/tighten, hold, and release completely.
Neck: Gently pull chin to chest, then look upward; release after each.
Shoulders: Raise toward ears, hold, and drop.
Arms: Press palms together, then hook fingers and pull apart; release.
Hands: Make fists, hold, and release.
Upper Back: Pull elbows back toward shoulder blades, hold, and release.
Stomach/Chest: Tighten as if rolling into a ball, hold, and release.
Lower Back: Arch gently, hold, and release.
Lower Body: Contract buttocks; press and tighten thighs; point toes downward/lift heels (carefully) for calves; curl toes. Hold each and release.
Finish with a full-body check; repeat on any area still holding tension

---

[44] Frank Amthor, PhD, "Neurobiology for Dummies", 2014, p345

[45] Frank Amthor, PhD, "Neurobiology for Dummies", 2014, p119

[46] Elliott and Smith, "Overcoming Anxiety for Dummies, 2nd Ed.", p186

[47] Charles H. Elliott, PhD and Laura L. Smith, PhD, "Overcoming Anxiety for Dummies, 2nd Ed.", p188, I changed the order of these to make it easier to remember: top of your head to your feet.

Physical and Cognitive Practices

5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Audit[48]: Grounds you by forcing a transition from internal thought loops to external data processing. Identify 5 things you see, 4 you can physically feel (the chair, fabric, or floor), 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.

Auditory Isolation: Close your eyes and isolate a single sound in your environment: the hum of a fan, distant traffic, or a clock ticking. Track that specific sound to pull attention away from internal stress chatter.

Category Scanning: Pick a specific attribute, like the color blue or square shapes, and scan the room to locate every instance of it. This simple, low-stakes focus task grounds cognitive energy in immediate reality.

Cognitive Distraction[49]: Disrupts circular stress patterns by engaging the brain in neutral, external processing. Examples include counting backward from 100 by 7s or reciting the alphabet backward.

Notice Details[50]: Pick a single physical feature in the room, such as window panes, floor tiles, or ceiling panels, and count them. Or, notice patterns in the carpet or wall paper. This forces the prefrontal cortex to take over visual-spatial processing from the amygdala.

Peripheral Vision Shift[51]: Expand your focus to include everything in your visual field without moving your eyes. Widening your field of view signals safety to the brain, directly reducing the physical fight-or-flight response.

Quick Check: A quick scan of common tension points. Periodically drop your jaw, let your tongue fall from the roof of your mouth, and drop your shoulders away from your ears to release unconscious buildup.

Tactile Anchoring[52]: Focuses attention on the present moment. Hold a small, textured object, such as a stone, coin, or piece of hardware, and focus entirely on its physical details: temperature, edges, weight, and texture.

Tactile Puzzles: Work on a Rubik's cube or a similar puzzle or fidget object.

Temperature Contrast[53]: Hold an ice cube in your hand or splash cold water on your face. The sharp change in temperature interrupts runaway thought loops and activates the mammalian dive reflex, slowing your heart rate.

There are thousands of grounding techniques. They work by disengaging the worried, stressed part of your brain and flipping on cognitive or sensory modes. The key is to engage your senses, fully engage yourself, and stay safe while doing it.[54] Consistent practice brings real change.

---

[48] https://www.themindfulnessapp.com/articles/use-5-4-3-2-1-technique-anxiety
[49] https://neurolaunch.com/distraction-techniques-mental-health/
[50] https://kategegg.com/how-to-ground/
[51] https://nlppod.com/how-to-use-peripheral-vision-for-instant-calm/
[52] https://www.productivepatty.com/using-tactile-anchors-for-safety/
[53] https://missionconnectionhealthcare.com/blog/5-grounding-techniques-for-overthinking/
[54] https://kategegg.com/how-to-ground/

Know[3.3-12] Stress Management: Foundation

Throughout this book, I strive to establish that your Hero's Journey is a holistic process. You are not a body, mind, and spirit, snapped together like a child's toy. For a stress management foundation, give equal attention to every aspect of life, including: movement, sleep, nutrition, how you breathe, how you think, emotional intelligence, spirituality, finances, and relationships. Keep in mind, also, those very personal things unique to you, your own Practices and Projects. While keeping stress management in mind, as a process, here are eight additional tips to work on:

There is always stress, so the only point is to make sure that it is useful to yourself and useful to others. --Hans Seyle

1. Know Your Stress. In the 1930s, a Hungarian-Canadian researcher named Hans Seyle[55] noticed that rats had specific physiological reactions to stress hormones. He also noted that, not only did humans react to stress too, but that "good" and "bad" stress caused the same physiological reactions.

For example, getting fired from your job or getting a raise at work cause similar reactions in your body. It seems that the only difference in whether the stress is harmful or not is your perception of it. If you view an event as a challenge instead of a setback, your reaction is completely different.[56]

Research suggests that a meaningful life is a stressful life, although the reverse is not necessarily true. Take a look at your own life situations where you learned important lessons or experienced personal growth. It is likely they were accompanied by high levels of stress. There is little growth without some kind of stress attached.[57] This is a valuable lesson to learn.

God, change me or change the situation.

--Stephanie, AA Member

2. Reframing and Self-Talk. Following up on the paragraphs above, you can change your perception of stressful situations, and therefore how your body reacts. Reframing refers to changing how you view a situation. The technical, positive aspect of reframing I am referring to is called "cognitive restructuring".[58] In simple terms, cognitive restructuring is a positive change in your mindset that makes you stronger and more capable of dealing with problems and setbacks. (See Reframing p. 309; Self-Talk p. 308)

Some forms of self-talk are helpful in maintaining mental health through cognitive restructuring. Positive self-talk may be used to override negative thoughts and personal biases that lead to negative inner dialogue. Such self-talk may be used to reframe your perception of stressful events.

3. Time Out, and Avoid or Limit Exposure. People take vacations from work to relax and recharge. You can do the same with stress in the short-term. When you know a certain situation or person causes you stress, have ready

---

[55] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Selye

[56] Kelly McGonical, "Upside of Stress", 2016, Blinkist sypnopsis

[57] Ibid.

[58] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_reframing

strategies at hand to remove yourself from the situation, at least temporarily, and to limit the stress you feel. (See Grit p. 196; WOOP p. 231)

4. Get organized. Shortage of time, and having a cluttered living or work area, are sources of stress. These may be mitigated by getting more organized, tidying up, and managing your time a little better. (See Organize p. 224)

5. Lifestyle Changes. Stress may often be dealt with effectively by making positive changes in your life. Nutrition, sleep,[59] exercise, supportive relationships, changing how you think, better resource management, caffeine reduction, and self-care all contribute to a healthy lifestyle and stress management. You may have to make difficult choices and follow through, especially if you are in a toxic relationship or career.

6. Living virtuously and helping others. Being a good person and helping others is a wonderful way to gain perspective on the stress in your life. Living virtuously and making the world better may not solve your problems, but they will not loom so large and therefore not cause so much distress.

7. Philosophy and Spirituality. I believe that the healthiest way to live is by adjusting to reality. Such a belief system requires a spiritual and philosophical outlook. Approaching life in this way builds resilience and a sense of acceptance that makes you stronger and better able to cope. It will also help you make better decisions for your long-term happiness.

It's going to be okay, even if it's not okay. --Maria, AA Member

8. Work the Steps. When you work the Steps… when you see your life as your Hero's Journey… when you seek improvement and growth through Knowledge and Wisdom, you will gradually become the person who can meet any stress or situation you find yourself in. I have seen it work in many people's lives, including my own. Strive always to live life on life's terms.[60]

Eat

An old adage states that your body replaces itself every 7 years. Although not technically true, it supports an important idea which is true: your body changes and repairs itself over time.[61] You can support these changes and repairs through a healthy diet.

There is no magic formula for eating well. Your diet, and its subsequent long-term effects on your health, is a matter of biology. A healthy diet helps you maintain good health. An unhealthy diet does not. Taking the steps necessary to eat well, even incrementally small steps, has a direct and positive impact on your health. A simple approach to a healthy diet works best. Eat healthy food. Refrain from unhealthy food.

---

[59] Allen Elkin, PhD, "Stress Management for Dummies, 2nd Ed.", 2013, Chap 3

[60] "Life on life's terms." is a recovery aphorism.

[61] https://askanaturalist.com/do-we-replace-our-cells-every-7-or-10-years/

Know[3.3-13] Healthy Food[62]

The core elements that make up a healthy diet include: Vegetables of all types: dark green, red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils, starchy, and other vegetables; Fruits, especially whole fruit; Grains, whole grains recommended; Dairy: milk and yogurt; Protein: meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, soy products; Fats and Oils: in moderation.[63]

Few adults follow a healthy diet. For example, in 2015, less than 1 in 10 adults in the United States had the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables in their diet.[64] If your diet is short of fruits and vegetables, you are missing out on essential vitamins, minerals, and other elements.

Although the amount of food required varies by sex, age, and activity, a starting point begins with a diet of 2,000 calories per day. If you are a young adult and very active, you might require 3,000 calories per day or more. So, the quantity of food may change, but the makeup of a healthy diet does not.[65]

For a healthy diet, think of a plate of food. Half the plate is fruits and vegetables (with more veggies than fruit), and the other half has grains and protein. All of the dietary guidelines I looked at agreed on these basics, with the following differences:

USDA MyPlate:[66] Includes both whole and refined grains, dairy with every meal (milk and yogurt), proteins include red meat and processed meats.

Harvard Plate:[67] Recommends only whole grains, limits dairy products (water is the preferred drink), emphasizes healthy proteins (fish, nuts, beans), with limited red and processed meat.

Mediterranean Diet:[68] Whole grains recommended, moderate dairy (cheese and yogurt), for protein, focus is on fish, legumes, nuts, with minimal red and processed meat.

The "plate of food" metaphor does not strictly represent every meal you eat. It is a simple guideline of the proportions of food you need for a healthy diet. Remember, half fruits and vegetables, half grains and protein, with types of grain, dairy, and protein sources left to your best discretion.

This does not mean you have to eat a salad while your friends eat pizza. It means that to be healthy, you must balance the food you eat, and eat in moderation. Eating right is a habit. It is not complicated, and it does not take a lot of willpower if you make it a habit. Begin developing that habit now, and you will soon be eating healthier and feeling better.

---

[62] While these are solid recommendations, always follow the latest research

[63] US Gov, "Dietary Guidelines for Americans", 2020-2025

[64] https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p1116-fruit-vegetable-consumption.html

[65] https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2022-01/SSwMP%20Mini-Poster_English_Final2022.pdf

[66] USDA MyPlate: https://myplate.gov

[67] Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health – Healthy Eating Plate: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/health-eating-plate/

[68] Oldways Mediterranean Diet Pyramid: https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet

Know[3.3-14] Unhealthy Food

A great acronym for unhealth types of food is CRAP: Calorie Rich And Processed.[69] High-calorie, processed food seems ubiquitous in our modern world. Some CRAP food is even labeled ultra-processed, with this rather frightening description: "formulations of ingredients, mostly of exclusive industrial use, that result from a series of industrial processes".[70] High calorie, processed food is cheap to manufacture, convenient to the consumer, and very profitable. Some examples are:[71]

Sugary beverages like soda, energy drinks, fruit punch, and "fruit juices".
Packaged snacks like chips and cookies.
Sweetened breakfast cereals.
Baking mixes such as stuffing, cake, brownie, and cookie mixes.
Meat products such as hot dogs and fish sticks.
Frozen meals such as pizza and TV dinners.
Powdered and packaged instant soups.
Candy, ice cream, sweetened yogurt, and cocoa mixes.
Packaged breads and buns; boxed pasta products.
Energy and protein bars and shakes.
Meal replacement shakes and powders for weight loss.
Margarine and other ultra-processed spreads.

You do not have to completely refrain from CRAP food; just try to eat less of it. Here are a couple of reminders for CRAP food:

6Cs[72] - Cola (and other sweetened drinks), cookies, candy, cake (and cake-like items such as donuts and muffins), cereal (breakfast cereals[73]), and chips (any kind of snack chips).

White Food[74] - White bread, white flour, white rice, and white potatoes. Reducing these may also assist in weight loss and balancing blood sugar levels.[75] You can replace these with whole grain products, brown rice, and nonstarchy vegetables.

More foods to watch out for are sugar, salt, and unsaturated fats (animal fat, butter, cheese, coconut oil and others). Try to keep these at less than 50 grams of added sugar (about 12½ teaspoons), less than 22 grams of saturated fat (about 5 teaspoons), and less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (a little less than ½ teaspoon).[76]

---

[69] Michael Greger MD, "How Not to Diet", Blinkist summary
[70] Carlos A Monteiro, et al, "Ultra-processed foods: what they are and how to identify them", https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/E6D744D714B1FF09D5BCA3E74D53A185/S1368980018003762a.pdf/ultra-processed-foods-what-they-are-and-how-to-identify-them.pdf
[71] https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/junk-food-vs-healthy-food#what-are-highly-processed-foods
[72] This list is mine, for something easy to remember.
[73] https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/are-breakfast-cereals-healthy#cereal-basics
[74] https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/white-foods
[75] https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/eliminating-four-white-foods-may-make-it-easier-to-eat-less-lose-weight/
[76] USDA, "Start Simple With MyPlate"

Weight Management

Although weight management is a neutral term, people generally view it as a desire to reduce their current weight to some ideal number. But for most of human history, food was scarce. People had to hunt and gather their own food to survive. Civilization could only develop along with the capabilities to grow, transport, and preserve food. Despite these advances, malnutrition is still a problem. Even in recent times, millions of people have starved due to natural disaster or political upheaval.[77]

So, if you want to "lose a few pounds", know that you are the fortunate rarity in human history. An overabundance of food would be seen as a blessing by most people, historically, and by many, currently. I say these things only so that you will understand how blessed we are! With that said, weight management can be reduced to two simple statements:[78]

If you consume more calories than you use, you gain weight.
If you consume fewer calories than you use, you lose weight.

But, because we are human, we make everything complicated. If we did not, the $50 billion weight-loss industry[79] would not exist. But the honest truth is that many factors that can cause you to gain weight or have difficulty losing it, including: genetics, your parents' weight, pregnancy, if you were breastfed, hormone levels, if your city is conducive to walking, access to fresh produce, the number of fast-food restaurants in your neighborhood, and if your job keeps you physically active or sedentary.[80] I will also add that, as I age, I find it easier to gain weight, and more difficult to lose it.

Many medications can cause weight gain, including: antipsychotics, anti-epileptics, antidepressants, beta blockers, hormonal contraceptives, insulin, and others.[81]

You may also eat, at times, for emotional reasons. You might turn to food when you feel sadness, guilt, boredom, frustration, loneliness, or anger.[82] And since food cannot satisfy your emotions, you eat without feeling full.

Some social or ethnic groups face serious obstacles to a healthy lifestyle.[83] Individuals residing in racially divided, low-income communities may lack access to local, nutritious food options.

Dieting can change your body's "setpoint" for what it considers an ideal weight.[84] If your body believes you are experiencing a food shortage (because you are dieting), it will reduce your metabolism and adjust other physiological mechanisms to maintain or even gain weight.

---

[77] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famine
[78] https://evolve-mma.com/blog/7-basic-rules-for-losing-weight/
[79] Michael Greger MD, "How Not to Diet", Blinkist summary
[80] Dana Lee-Baggley, PhD., "Healthy Habits Suck", Chap 2
[81] Derrick Cetin, D.O., "Medications that Can Cause Weight Gain", Slideshow, Cleveland Clinic, 15 Sep 2018
[82] Linda Bacon, PhD, "Health at Every Size", 2008, p31
[83] https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-racist-roots-of-fighting-obesity2/#Echobox=1672232797
[84] Linda Bacon, PhD, "Health at Every Size", 2008, Chap 1

Even with these factors, no matter how difficult or unfair it seems, your health and quality of life are at stake. The key to weight management is to stop blaming yourself and quit the diet habit.[85] Instead, keep a healthy weight by maintaining a healthy lifestyle. *You must do your very best* to think, eat, sleep, and move in a healthy way, every day.

But what can you do when you are craving some CRAP food? I found two practical tools that help me to be mindful of my hunger. Using these tools, I realized that being slightly hungry is not fatal, and I find it easier to maintain a comfortable and healthy weight. I also realized that I often feel hungry when I am actually thirsty, tired, or emotionally upset. Occasional slight hunger, instead of constant fullness, makes me feel more alert, motivated to get things done, and aware of my physical body.

Know[3.3-15] Two Practical Tools

The hunger level scale[86] is a subjective assessment of how physically hungry you are, where 1 = dizzy, weak, starving and 10 = overfull, uncomfortable, lethargic. Simply pausing and rating your hunger before, and while, you eat helps you: realize if you are eating because of physical hunger or for psychological reasons, and stop eating when you are physically full.

Another helpful idea is "Hara hachi bun me," a Japanese phrase that means, "eat until you are 80% full".[87] Keeping this idea in mind makes it less likely you will eat when you are not really hungry. It also reminds you to stop eating before you are overly full.

We should disconnect the idea of being healthy from the idea or goal of losing weight.

--Dr. Sara Shah

When you pay less attention to your weight, and more to eating healthy and taking care of yourself, you will find weight management much easier. Switching from high carb, high fat comfort food takes time, but your body will thank you. You will feel better and have more energy, every day.

Best Food Choice: Fresh, Canned, Frozen, or Dried

We are fortunate in that we now have a great variety of ways to store and transport food. Fresh food is nearly always touted as being the most nutritious. And this is true for fresh-picked produce stored in optimal conditions and consumed quickly.[88] But truly fresh food is limited by season and region. The fact is that, in general, the nutritional value of fresh, canned, and frozen food is similar.[89] Following are some important considerations concerning food cost, nutrition, and storage:[90]

---

85 Linda Bacon, PhD, "Health at Every Size", 2008, p50

86 https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/152812/wtmgt_hungerscale.pdf

87 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hara_hachi_bun_me

88 https://fruitandvegetable.ucdavis.edu/files/217102.pdf

89 https://examine.com/articles/fresh-vs-frozen-vs-canned-vegetables/

90 Summarized: Assistant, OpenAI, (2023). Food Cost and Storage, Fresh, Canned, Frozen, Dried. Retrieved from https://openai.com/assistant/

Fresh food is generally the most nutritious, but is difficult to transport and store. It has a short shelf life.

Canned food is usually the most cost-effective. It has a long shelf life and is easily stored. Some canned food, however, can be high in sodium and preservatives.

Dried food, such as dried fruits and vegetables, is great for long-term storage. It has a good shelf life and is easy to transport. Dried food can be expensive compared to canned or frozen food

Frozen food is a good option for those looking for a balance between nutrition and cost-effectiveness. Frozen fruits and vegetables are often cheaper than fresh produce and can last for several months in the freezer. But, if you lose power to your freezer, you also lose the food in it.

For your needs, balance nutrition, cost, and ease of storage. Keep fresh and frozen food to add nutrition and variety to your diet. The US government suggests having at least several days of stored food on hand in case of emergency.[91] (See Other Considerations p. 453)

Water

A general recommendation for daily fluid intake is to drink 4 to 6 cups (32-48 ounces) per day.[92] Other recommendations are higher (men:125oz., women:91oz), although this estimate includes approximately 20% of your fluid intake from food.[93]

Your requirements will vary depending on your size, health, environment, and activity level. The best way to know how much fluid you need is, when you are thirsty, drink water or other fluids.[94] Tea, fruit juice, and other fluids contribute to your fluid intake. As a rule, avoid sugary drinks like soda and sugar-added fruit drinks.

Know[3.3-16] Rules of thumb for food and water:

Eat the best food available that you can afford.
Balance nutrition, cost, and storage.
Daily fluid intake should be at least 64 oz per day.[95]
Always keep some extra food and water on hand.

Taking Supplements[96]

Depending on what supplements you take, how much, and how frequently you take them, some supplements behave like drugs and may be hazardous. Seventeen supplements are known to induce kidney dysfunction or failure, and several additional dietary chemicals are known to be harmful to genes and may cause cancer.

---

[91] https://www.ready.gov/kit
[92] https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/how-much-water-should-you-drink
[93] https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/features/wonders-of-water
[94] Ibid.
[95] Dr. Diana Joy Ostroff, "The Wisdom of Well-Being", 2012, Kindle loc 302
[96] Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", Chap 15

Supplements are not regulated like prescription medications. Before you begin taking any supplements, consider whether it may adversely interact with other supplements or medications you are taking. When using supplements:

Let your health care professionals know about any supplements you are taking. Notify them before you begin taking any supplements.

Avoid taking a supplement in excess of the recommended dosage unless your doctor has instructed you to do so.

Stop taking the supplement and call your doctor if you encounter any adverse effects.

Some dietary supplement elements, such as minerals and plant-based materials, might be harmful. Never replace a prescription medication with a nutritional supplement without your doctor's knowledge. A partial list of some potentially harmful supplements is:[97] Vitamins A, D, and E, Iron, and some B Vitamins, lithium,[98] St. John's Wort,[99] and others. If in doubt, talk to your doctor first.

Supplements can be expensive. Do your research; there is no need to waste money on supplements your body does not need. However, while keeping safety in mind, you may find some supplements to be beneficial:

Probiotics:[100] keep gut flora healthy, and may be useful in lowering blood glucose levels, improving metabolism, reducing constipation, and may be linked to improved mood and cognition.[101]

Fiber supplements:[102] can be used to aid digestion, manage weight and blood glucose, prevent constipation, and reduce cholesterol

Nutritional supplements: although vitamin deficiencies are rare in people who have an adequate diet,[103] many people can benefit from vitamin supplements such as: vitamin D, magnesium, calcium, zinc, iron, folic acid, vitamin B12, and others.[104]

Mood enhancing supplements:[105] although some supplements are advertised as helpful to mood, check with your doctor first; exercise and other lifestyle changes can also affect mood in a positive way.

---

[97] https://www.flushinghospital.org/newsletter/can-you-overdose-on-vitamins/

[98] https://www.healthline.com/health/lithium-toxicity

[99] https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/tips-what-you-should-know-about-popular-herbs

[100] https://supplements.selfdecode.com/blog/probiotics-weight-blood-sugar-metabolic-health/

[101] https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/probiotics-may-help-boost-mood-and-cognitive-function

[102] https://www.healthline.com/health/digestive-health/whats-the-best-fiber-supplement

[103] Carol Ann Rinzler, "Nutrition for Dummies 4th Ed.", 2006, p132

[104] https://www.healthline.com/health/food-nutrition/best-vitamins-to-take-daily#_noHeaderPrefixedContent

[105] https://www.webmd.com/diet/features/herbs-vitamins-and-supplements-used-to-enhance-mood

Urination and Defecation

Urination and defecation are essential for maintaining good health as they help to remove excess fluids, electrolytes, toxins, and waste products from the body. These processes should be regular and not uncomfortable. They can tell you a lot about your health.

Urination[106]

Human urine is typically a straw-yellow color. If your urine is other than a straw-yellow color, it may indicate an underlying pathological condition. Urine color may temporarily change as a result of an infection, illness, medication, or food. For example, cloudy or milky urine that is typically accompanied by a foul smell may be an indication of a urinary tract infection.

Dark urine that appears brown but is clear could be a sign of a significant liver condition like cirrhosis or hepatitis. Generally speaking, beets, blackberries, certain food dyes, hemolytic anemia, renal impairment, urinary tract infection, medication, porphyria, intra-abdominal bleeding, vaginal bleeding, and neoplasm located in either bladder or kidney pathways cause urine that appears pink, red, or lighter brown.

If urine appears dark yellow or orange in color, a laxative, carotene, phenazopyridine, rifampin, or a recent usage of a dietary supplement containing riboflavin may be the cause. Artificial colors found in foods and medications, or urinary tract infections, may be the cause of, or contributing factor to, the urine turning green or blue.

If in doubt, or if discoloration of urine continues, see your doctor.

Defecation

The Bristol stool scale is a diagnostic medical tool designed to classify the form of human feces into seven categories:[107]

Type 1: Separate hard lumps, like nuts (difficult to pass)
Type 2: Sausage-shaped, but lumpy
Type 3: Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4: Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft (average stool)
Type 5: Soft blobs with clear cut edges
Type 6: Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool (diarrhea)
Type 7: Watery, no solid pieces, entirely liquid (diarrhea)

Types 1 and 2 indicate constipation, and Type 3 and 4 are ideal and easy to pass, 5 indicates lack of sufficient dietary fiber, and 6 and 7 indicate diarrhea.

If you have blood in your stool, the cause may range from not serious to a very serious physical condition.[108] See your doctor as soon as possible.

---

[106] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abnormal_urine_color
[107] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_stool_scale
[108] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_in_stool

Sleep

We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

--William Shakespeare

During sleep, your body produces hormones that regulate growth and development, and repair damaged tissues.[109] Your memory, learning capacity, and decision-making ability are all improved by sleep. It boosts your immune system and aids in disease prevention and recovery. A healthy microbiota in the gut, aided by regular sleep, helps regulate your appetite, and is a key component of nutritional well-being.[110]

I recall reading many self-help and productivity books that recommended "getting up a little earlier" in order to get more done. There are many benefits to this advice, including being less stressed getting ready for work, having some personal quiet time, finding time for exercise, and starting a daily routine.[111] However, some people are "morning" people, and some are not, and this trait seems to be genetically determined.[112] Getting up early, but not going to sleep correspondingly early, is counter-productive.

Healthy sleep has 5 stages that occur in cycles. Each stage is necessary and aids in some aspect of cognitive or physical health.[113] Losing 90 minutes of sleep can reduce your alertness the following day by one-third.[114] Chronic sleep deprivation can result in a host of problems, including: rapid aging, increased risk of illness and infection, mood swings, depression, anxiety, cognitive issues such as poor memory and decision making, risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.[115]

As a guideline, experts suggest that healthy adults should sleep between seven and nine hours per night.[116] Teenagers require one to two hours extra sleep, while newborns under two months old require 12 to 18 hours of sleep every day. Although there is substantial debate as to why, adults over 65 seem to require less sleep (although personally, and through the anecdotes of others, I have not found this to be true).

Too much or too little sleep can be the result of a multitude of factors, or combinations of factors. Lifestyle, and general mental and physical health can affect your quantity and quality of sleep. You are the best judge of when and how much sleep you need. Both quality of sleep, and quantity, are important. You know you had a good night's sleep when you wake up refreshed, eager to meet the day, clear-headed, with a balanced mood.[117]

---

109 Hirshkowitz, PhD, DABSM and Smith, "Sleep Disorders for Dummies", 2004, Ch 1
110 Mathew Walker, "Why We Sleep", 2017, 12min summary
111 https://succeedfeed.com/benefits-of-waking-up-early/
112 Mathew Walker, "Why We Sleep", 2017, 12min summary, ##Circadian Rythm
113 Hirshkowitz, PhD, DABSM and Smith, "Sleep Disorders for Dummies", 2004, Ch 1
114 Tom Rath, “Eat Move Sleep”, 2013, 12min summary
115 Hirshkowitz, PhD, DABSM and Smith, "Sleep Disorders for Dummies", 2004, Ch 1
116 Dr. Chris Idzikowski, "The Expert Guide to Sleeping Well", 2019
117 Renata L. Riha, MD, "Sleep: Your Questions Answered", 2007

Know[3.3-17] Tips for a good night's sleep:[118]

Keep a consistent sleep schedule, if possible. It is hard to adjust to a chaotic sleep routine. Catching up on sleep may mean you are not getting enough.

Exercise is excellent, but not more than 5 or 6 hours before bed. Do what works for you. I find that mild or moderate exercise in the evening helps me sleep better. Some kinds of exercise, like Yoga, may be beneficial as well.[119]

Avoid using nicotine. Besides being *really bad for your health*, nicotine can disrupt smokers' sleep and cause them to wake up early to smoke.

Reduce caffeine late in the day. Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, colas, some teas, and chocolate. Its effects can last up to 8 hours. Consequently, a late-afternoon coffee can make it difficult for you to get to sleep at night.

Do not consume alcohol before going to bed. Alcohol prevents you from entering deep sleep or REM sleep, keeping you in the lighter stages of sleep.

Avoid consuming a lot of food or drink late at night. A heavy dinner can result in indigestion. Too much liquid may wake you up to urinate.

Some over the counter and herbal medicines for coughs, colds, and allergies, and some frequently prescribed medications, can cause sleep disturbances.

If you have difficulties falling asleep, check with your doctor to determine if any medications you are taking could be the cause.

Although naps can help make up for lost sleep, taking them in the late afternoon or evening may make it more difficult to fall asleep at night.

Pre-bedtime relaxation Unwind your evening schedule. Your night routine should include a calming activity like reading or listening to music.

A hot bath before bed can help you relax, slow down, and feel drowsy so you are better prepared to fall asleep.

Create a comfortable sleeping space. Get rid of any bright lights, uncomfortable beds, TVs, computers, or anything that keeps you awake.

Get some sunshine. Regulating regular sleep cycles requires daylight. Spend at least 30 minutes each day outside in the sunlight.

Avoid lying awake in bed. After more than 20 minutes, if you still feel awake, get out of bed and engage in some calming activities until you fall asleep.

Put your phone away. Social media and the phone's blue light can interrupt your sleep cycle and make it difficult for you to enter deep stages of sleep.[120]

If you still have difficulties sleeping, consult a doctor. You may have a sleep issue if you frequently feel tired during the day.

---

[118] U.S. Dept of HHS, "Your Guide to Healthy Sleep", Nov 2005

[119] Anna Black, "Mindfulness and Sleep", 2018

[120] https://health.clevelandclinic.org/put-the-phone-away-3-reasons-why-looking-at-it-before-bed-is-a-bad-habit/

Move

Once your body is in workout-mode, a few days off won't hurt. Muscle memory is magical. If you work out consistently, you can afford to miss a few sessions and your body will gladly pick up where you left off.

-- Rachel Nichols

In Truths About Your Body, I discussed how physical activity benefits your health. But simply listing the benefits of exercise is not sufficient to motivate most people to actually *do* the exercise. It often only produces guilt and fear, expressed through "should's" and "need-to's". There are also those few who may have a panic disorder and fear exercise may cause a panic attack. If this is the case with you, see your doctor.[121]

However, I would like to add some comments to illustrate the positive aspects of healthy movement:

After I do some form of vigorous movement, *I feel physically, mentally, and emotionally better*. However, reading the facts is one thing, but *experiencing the benefits* is another! After physical activity, I feel more alive, my problems seem less daunting, and I often have unexpected creative insights. These benefits show up after the initial resistance to movement is overcome. I have to re-learn this fact every time my workout regimen wanes… every time!

In contrast to the benefits, lack of movement, over time, can *greatly reduce your quality of life*! If you are young, you will not much notice the results of inactivity. But as people age, many become prisoners of their own bodies. While accidents and illness happen, your body can better weather these if you are healthy in the first place. A sedentary lifestyle will kill you.[122] But before it does, it will reduce your mobility and flexibility,[123] and thus, your quality of life.

With that said (I apologize for my carrot and stick approach), I will get to the point: how to start and keep a fitness program that works for you.

The first order of business is to do away with the word "exercise" and the negative baggage it carries. Exercise implies forcing yourself into effort on a schedule. Our ancestors did not "exercise". They walked, ran, climbed, and stretched; they pushed, pulled, lifted, and threw things. They moved for survival and enjoyment. We did not evolve to exercise; we evolved to move.

The idea of movement opens up a wide range of possibilities. Movement is continuous, varied, and fun. It becomes part of your lifestyle. Research indicates shorter periods of movement (10 minutes) throughout the day are similarly beneficial to 30 minutes of continuous exercise.[124] So, from here on, I am using the word "movement" to indicate the various types of fitness activities available to you.

---

[121] Charles H. Elliott, PhD and Laura L. Smith, PhD, "Overcoming Anxiety for Dummies, 2nd Ed.", 2010, p173

[122] Daniel Lieberman, "Exercised", 2021, 12 Minute Summary

[123] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XM-Jzq-pOA&list=WL&index=7

[124] Schlosberg and Neporent,M.A., et al, "Fitness for Dummies", 3rd Ed., p117

The second important point is that, if you do not enjoy what you are doing to keep fit, you will not do it for long.[125] You might start out fully motivated and bursting with enthusiasm (forgetting, perhaps, that you have done so many times before), but eventually, willpower wanes, and you quit.

Third, make it convenient. Any barrier to your fitness activity makes it less likely you will do it. For example, pulling your equipment out of the closet to set it up, or driving across town to the gym, are barriers to your fitness habit. If you have a day where you are on the fence about following your fitness routine, even the slightest barrier may be enough to hold you up.

Know[3.3-18] Three Ways to Make Movement Enjoyable

Make it part of your lifestyle.
Make if fun.
Make it convenient.

With this foundation, it is relatively simple to create your own individualized fitness program. Tailor the following information in light of your own fitness goals and abilities. Remember, this is all about YOU! The exact combination and frequency of your fitness activities will depend on your individual circumstances. It is always a good idea to consult with a healthcare provider or fitness professional to determine the right plan for you.

Despite my best intentions (and years of collecting books, videos, DVDs, and articles concerning different types of fitness workouts), I am forced to admit the impracticality of providing you with specific workouts or types of movements. My own fitness regimen has changed so often and so radically over the years that I could not even provide a long-term program for myself. Each individual is not only different, but everyone changes over time. Therefore, I am providing a broad scope of fitness categories for you to build your own healthy lifestyle. I invite you to the adventure of exploration and the sense of accomplishment you will feel as you include healthy movement in your daily routine.

Know[3.3-19] Three broad categories of movement for good health:[126]

1. Aerobic Fitness, or "cardio", for cardiovascular fitness and endurance.[127] Aerobic exercise is any type of physical activity that increases your heart rate and breathing rate, and it can help improve your cardiovascular health and fitness. Any activity that gets your heart rate up and keeps it elevated for an extended period of time can be considered aerobic exercise.

---

[125] Maria Brilaki, "Surprisingly Unstuck", 2012, p125

[126] "types" of exercise are usually viewed as aerobic, strength, flexibility, and balance. Combining the latter two makes it easier to design your fitness program. https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/four-types-exercise-can-improve-your-health-and-physical-ability#:~:text=Research %20has%20shown %20that%20it's,boredom%20 and%20risk%20of%20injury; https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/the-4-most-important-types-of-exercise

[127] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aerobic_exercise

Here are some examples of aerobic exercises:[128] running, jogging, brisk walking, cycling, swimming, aerobic dance, Zumba, jumping rope, high-intensity interval training (HIIT), martial arts (such as boxing, kickboxing, karate, jujitsu, etc.), stair climbing, rowing, elliptical training, cross-country skiing, circuit training, treadmill workouts, step aerobics, hiking.

2. Strength Training, for overall strength, muscle mass, and bone density.[129] Strength training is a type of physical activity that involves using resistance to build muscular strength, endurance, and power.

Examples of strength training activities are:[130] weightlifting, bodyweight exercises (push-ups, pull-ups, squats, lunges, etc.) resistance band workouts, kettlebell exercises, medicine ball exercises, dumbbell and barbell exercises, plyometric exercises (box jumps, burpees, jump squats, etc.), isometric exercises (planks, wall sits, etc.), cable machine exercises, stability ball exercises, Yoga and Pilates (which can include strength-building poses and exercises), strongman training (tire flips, sled pulls, etc.), CrossFit workouts (which often include a mix of different strength training exercises).

3. Functional Fitness, for flexibility, balance, and range of motion. Functional fitness exercises are designed to improve your ability to perform everyday activities, such as lifting, carrying, and reaching, with greater ease and efficiency.[131] Functional fitness movements focus on movements that mimic real-life activities, and they often involve multi-joint movements that engage multiple muscle groups at once. These improve your overall strength, endurance, balance, and coordination.

Functional fitness example exercises are:[132] squats, lunges, deadlifts, push-ups, pull-ups, kettlebell swings, box jumps, medicine ball slams, farmer's walk (walking while carrying weights), bear crawl, step-ups, battle ropes, sled pushes/pulls, tire flips, sandbag carries, agility ladder drills, hiking, rock climbing, kayaking/canoeing.

Another kind of functional fitness is Natural Movement, which are fitness activities outside of gyms and other conventional routines. For example, moving a 20-pound rock is more difficult than moving a 20-pound dumbbell. Running on a treadmill is good cardio, but so is hiking, which helps to improve your balance, stability, and coordination.

I also consider breathing as a functional exercise. Your breathing is controlled by sophisticated musculature surrounding your lungs. These benefit from training like any other muscle. Such training improves endurance[133] and may lower blood pressure,[134] as well.

---

[128] Original list: OpenAI. (2021). ChatGPT https://openai.com/, retrieved 19 Feb 2021

[129] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strength_training

[130] Original list: OpenAI. (2021). ChatGPT https://openai.com/, retrieved 19 Feb 2021

[131] https://www.nerdfitness.com/blog/the-ultimate-guide-for-functional-fitness-exercises-and-workout-plans/

[132] Original list: OpenAI. (2021). ChatGPT https://openai.com/, retrieved 20 Feb 2021

[133] https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-this-simple-breathing-exercise-may-improve-your-endurance

[134] https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/09/20/1123500781/daily-breath-training-can-work-as-well-as-medicine-to-reduce-high-blood-pressure

Know[3.3-20] Type and Length of Fitness Activities

In addition to the types of movement you need to maintain good health, it is helpful to know the amount of time and effort required. Although this is determined, once again, by your goals and capabilities, here are five general rules to get you started:

1. Remember that any fitness activity is better than no fitness activity. But once you have your routine in place, the recommended goal is to spend 150 minutes per week on moderate activities (or 75 minutes per week on vigorous activities), and strength training twice per week.[135]

Do more if you can (up to 5 hours / week for more benefits).
Work up to at least 10 minutes at a time.
You can combine vigorous and moderate activities.
Do strength training at least twice a week.
Try to do something every day to keep the habit going.

A term I thought I coined myself (but apparently did not), is "micro-workout".[136] For me, a micro-workout is any physical activity that is only 1 to 5 minutes long. It consists of any physical activity that gets you off your butt and moving, including stretching, jumping jacks, shadow boxing, or bodyweight exercises. You can incorporate micro-workouts into any part of your daily routine. In my opinion, micro-workouts are the simplest and best way to start, maintain, or regain a movement routine! (Note: I also found that 3 or 4 short, intense micro-workouts spread out over my day bring real and measurable reductions in my blood pressure. See your doctor first.)

2. The amount of effort required is the determinant between "moderate" and "vigorous" activity:[137]

Moderate activity is anything that noticeably raises your pulse and respiration; think of brisk walking. Vigorous activity is anything that requires significant effort, such as running or jogging.

You can also gauge your effort through your pulse by knowing your maximum heart rate and training range.[138] Your maximum heart rate is 220 minus your age. Your training heart range is 50% - 75% of your max. I will use my own age as an example in these calculations:

As I write this, I am 66 years old. So, 220 - 66 = 154. My maximum heart rate is 154. To calculate the lower end of my training heart range, I take 50% of my maximum heart rate. On a calculator: 154 * .5 = 77. To get my upper training heart range, I find 75% of my maximum. So, I would calculate: 154 * .75 = 115.5.

---

[135] US Gov't ODPHP Publication No. U0037, "Be Active Your Way: A Guide for Adults", Oct 2008

[136] https://www.eatingwell.com/article/7914117/health-benefits-micro-workouts-plus-how-to-do-it/

[137] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Physical Activities Guidelines for Americans, 2nd Ed.", p30

[138] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services "Your Guide to Physical Activity and Your Heart", June 2006, p20

Keep in mind that this formula is only a guideline. Other sources recommend an upper heart range of 85% of maximum.[139] For me, this would be 154 * .85 = 130. Everyone is different, and this formula may not reflect the proper range of training for you. Consult with a qualified health professional before beginning or changing your fitness routine.

3. This can all get very complicated, so I keep it simple. My casual goal is to do 20 - 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day. This includes cardio, strength training, and functional fitness. Sometimes I do more, sometimes less. Usually, I end up with around 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous, and varied, activity in a week. Although keeping a log is helpful,[140] I just track my time and do not worry too much about the other details.

Always remember there is an "ebb and flow" to all of this… when I first wrote this section, I was at "flow". As I edit it, I am at "ebb". It is consistent effort over time that matters. Aim for progress… always progress.

4. When doing your fitness activities, warm up before, and cool down after. Work for slow and steady improvement. Vary your activities. Be vigilant against boredom and routine. Make your fitness activities part of your lifestyle, and keep them convenient and fun. Here are some tips to maintain your program:[141]

Work on the habit first.
Just show up and do something, anything, to get on track.
Recommit to your health as a value.
If it isn't fun anymore, find something that is.
Change your schedule around.
Try working out with a friend.
Track your workouts in a notebook or calendar.
Start small, go back to your minimums.
Make a schedule, stack your habits.

And finally, if you are sick of the gym (or whatever your routine is), just go for a walk. This happened to me a couple years ago… I had a fabulous gym habit going, and I felt pretty good about myself. But when some beautiful spring weather hit, I started to dread going to a (as I began to perceive it) dark and smelly gym. I finally realized that walking is good for me, too![142] After that, when the weather was nice, I went for a walk and loved it. Walking is now a major part of my fitness routine.

5. Keep safety in mind.[143] Start slowly and gradually increase your efforts. Work on activities that suit your fitness level. Use the right safety gear and equipment, and choose a safe place to work out. If you have any health concerns, consult a certified trainer or health care provider.

---

[139] https://health.clevelandclinic.org/exercise-heart-rate-zones-explained/
[140] US Gov ODPHP Publication No. U0050, "Exercise Activity Log", 2008
[141] https://www.lifehack.org/articles/featured/15-tips-to-restart-the-exercise-habit-and-how-to-keep-it.html
[142] Erin Palinski-Wade, RD, CDE, LDN, "Walking the Weight Off for Dummies", 2015
[143] US Gov't ODPHP Publication No. U0037, "Be Active Your Way: A Guide for Adults", Oct 2008

Fitness Information and Costs

Note: Always see your doctor or a health care professional before beginning or changing your fitness routine.

I do not provide you with lists of specific types of movement or fitness plans, because everyone is different, your needs will change, and easily accessible information is already available. The primary sources of information are:

Live classes and personal trainers: In-person training is usually the most expensive, but it can also be the most informative and useful. You do not have to commit to a full range of classes or sessions. A few classes, or one or two sessions with a certified trainer, can go a long way to getting you started (or restarted) toward your fitness goals.[144] Some skills, such as Tai Chi, Yoga, and martial arts, are best learned from a certified instructor.

Online classes and training (paid or free): Thousands of online videos, for learning nearly any skill, are freely available. The problem is sorting through them to find those that are created by professionals. Find media that will expand your skills and push you outside your comfort zone. Look for curated lists that align with your interests.[145]

Physical Media and Books: The availability of online and in-person classes makes old-style media less of a requirement, but you can still learn a lot from them. The problem with these is that if you learn a move or technique wrong, it is difficult to correct later, and may cause injury.

Your Body and Mind: You already possess the two primary tools needed for fitness: a human body and mind. Once you learn the basics, you can put a program together that is completely unique to you. It is fun, convenient, and you can tailor it to your needs.

Gizmos and Gadgets

After wasting an incredible amount of money on weights and equipment I rarely used, I came up with a rule of thumb for future purchases. If I am not already engaged in fitness activities, it is unlikely that buying a gadget or gym membership will change that. In fact, gyms count on people not showing up to use their memberships.[146] Spend your money on fitness equipment or memberships only if you have a routine established, and want to improve it, or learn new skills and techniques.

Your body and mind are all you really need to begin your fitness activities. Try incorporating walking, jogging, or bodyweight workouts into your daily routine. If you maintain those, you will probably make good use of any new equipment you invest in later.

---

144 Suzanne Schlosberg and Liz Neporent,M.A., with Tere Stouffer Drenth, "Fitness for Dummies, 3rd Ed", Chap 4 "Hiring a Trainer"

145 https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/fitness/g33326349/best-youtube-workouts/; https://www.buzzfeed.com/carolynkylstra/youtube-fitness

146 https://www.denverpost.com/2016/01/08/got-a-gym-membership-heres-what-you-should-know/

Smart Devices (as I write this) are popular, but can be pricey. They may not always take accurate readings,[147] and they can make your fitness routine less enjoyable by overwhelming you with data and notifications.[148] They cannot accurately gauge movement like Yoga, pushups, pullups, stretching, and so on. For some individuals, however, they may be helpful by providing motivation and tracking progress over time.

Here are a few other inexpensive gadgets you might consider:

Cardio Sensor: Fitness trackers may track heart rates, but the most accurate cardio sensor is a strap that the user wears around their chest. An external reader or phone app detects signals from the sensor and display a real-time heart rate.

Blood Pressure Device: A fundamental statistic of your health is your blood pressure. Over the counter blood pressure measuring devices are usually battery powered, portable, digital devices that can inform you of your general health and stress levels.

O2 Device: A fingertip sensor that quickly and easily measures your blood oxygen levels.

Resistance breathing device[149]: You can buy expensive digital versions, or simple plastic ones. I have a cheap plastic one. I found that it seemed to make my breathing easier and stronger with practice.

Hand Grips: Hand grip exercisers are simple devices that are used for developing muscular strength in your hands, forearms and arms. Regular use increases grip strength, a form of functional fitness. They may also improve endurance, motion control, and range of motion, and increase blood circulation to the extremities. There is also evidence that using handgrips isometrically reduces blood pressure.[150] Follow these steps:

You need a handgrip or other device you can squeeze.
Squeeze with one hand for two minutes at 30% of max.
Rest for two minutes.
Squeeze with the other hand for two minutes at 30% max.
Do two repetitions for each hand.
Repeat 3 times a week.

The question, of course, is how do you know what is 30% of your maximum? You can buy devices to measure grip, but I use cheap manual grips and I estimate or just try a little harder.

Note: I found that I can use the resistance breathing device during the rest period of using the hand grips. It is a quick, easy, and efficient way to stack activities and make the best use of my time.

---

147 https://www.livescience.com/how-accurate-are-fitness-trackers

148 https://fitnessclerk.com/how-my-fitness-tracker-turned-me-against-myself/

[149] https://www.hfe.co.uk/blog/dont-hold-your-breath-respiratory-muscle-training-devices-do-they-work/

150 https://www.hellahealth.com/blog/wellness/lower-blood-pressure/

Strength Training Equipment: Dumbbells, kettle bells, hand grips, and resistance bands are inexpensive, easy to store, and easy to use for strength training. Keep it simple. Only buy what you will use.

Remember these things about movement:
Anything is better than nothing.
Micro-workouts are workouts.
If it isn't fun, you won't do it.
The habit is more important than immediate results.
150 minutes / week is only 22 minutes a day.
Try to do something every day.

Personal Hygiene[151]

Personal hygiene refers to the practices and habits that individuals adopt to maintain cleanliness. It is an essential part of daily life that promotes good health and prevents the spread of disease. It can also boost self-esteem and confidence. Feeling clean and fresh helps you feel comfortable and confident in social situations, and improves your mood and sense of wellbeing.

There are several types of personal hygiene practices that you can adopt to maintain cleanliness and prevent the spread of disease. These include:

Hands: Hand hygiene is one of the most important forms of personal hygiene. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water can help to remove germs and prevent the spread of infection.

Oral: Good oral hygiene practices, such as brushing and flossing your teeth, can help to prevent tooth decay, gum disease, and bad breath.

Body: showering or bathing regularly removes dirt and sweat from the skin. This prevents the growth of bacteria and reduces the risk of infection.

Hair: Regularly washing and brushing your hair removes dirt and oil from the scalp, preventing the growth of bacteria and promoting healthy hair.

Nail: Keeping your nails clean and trimmed prevents the buildup of bacteria and reduces the risk of infection.

Clothing: Regularly washing your clothing removes dirt and bacteria, preventing the spread of infection.

Living area: It does not do a lot of good to keep yourself clean if your living and working areas are not. Here are 10 things that have more germs than a public toilet:[152] gym equipment, chopping boards, beards (including fecal bacteria), handbags (the bottom, often placed on the floor), kitchen sinks (100,000 times more bacteria than a public toilet), laundry (your underwear can contain 500,000,000 E.coli bacteria; use a hot wash at least once a month), kitchen sponges, carpets (up to 4000 times more than a toilet seat), washroom sink taps, light switches (200 bacteria / sq inch).

---

[151] Edited from ChatGPT, "Importance and Types of Personal Hygiene", February 23, 2023, https://github.com/openai/gpt-3, OpenAI

[152] blog.bunzlchs.com/the-hardest-which-has-more-germs-quiz-youll-ever-take/

Illness, Pain, and the End of Life

Suffering is one very long moment. We cannot divide it by seasons. We can only record its moods, and chronicle their return.

--Oscar Wilde, "De Profundis"

When I began this project, I made a commitment to confront the hard questions. A philosophy of life that applies only when times are good is no philosophy at all. When you most need comfort and strength, those are the times that try your soul.[153] It is then you decide if the universe is friendly, if your life has meaning, and if your God loves you.

Illness, pain, and the death of the physical body are intrinsic to the experience of life. And life can be cruel. Our bodies are frail. No one escapes illness and injury, pain and death. Health and beauty are temporary, on loan from Fate. Sickness, pain, and death are inevitable.

For, while yet inconstant Fortune
Poured her gifts and all was bright,
Death's dark hour had all but whelmed me
In the gloom of endless night.
--Boethius

Avoiding Illness and Pain

A simple diet, enough exercise and moderation in all things are the best ingredients for a healthy, long life. --Hippocrates

In addition to regular examinations and prompt medical care, a nutritious diet and regular exercise are crucial for a healthy lifestyle. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that poor diet and lack of exercise account for one-third of all diseases in Western nations.[154] You can reduce the risk of serious diseases like diabetes, cancer, heart attack, and stroke by more than half by following these simple guidelines: (See A Plan for Health p. 251)

Know[3.3-21] How to be Healthy

Eat a diet consisting of plenty of fruits and vegetables.
Moderate consumption of meat and meat products.
Avoid obesity.
Exercise at least 2.5 hours a week.
Do not smoke.
Moderate alcohol intake.

Living with Illness and Pain

There is something about living with constant pain that builds inside of you. Yes, it's strength but it is also courage every time you choose to be an active participant in life. Some days you will be overcome with feelings of wanting to give up. Give yourself grace on those days because you can't be strong 100% of the time.

--Allison Chovanec

---

[153] Paraphrased from Thomas Paine, "The American Crisis", 1776
[154] Dietger Mathias, "Staying Healthy From 1 to 100", 2016. p107

Physical pain can be crippling, crushing, and debilitating beyond words. Pain, illness, and injury are not the end of life, but they require great reserves of courage and strength.

It is estimated that the number of people who live with some type of disability may be as high as 15% of the global population.[155] Fifteen to 20% of Americans experience some level of chronic pain.[156] And yet humans are incredibly resilient. Many people, past and present, suffering from pain, illness, and disability, have accomplished extraordinary things despite the hardships they endured.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher who suffered health problems most of his life but profoundly influenced modern thought.[157]

Helen Keller was deaf and blind but inspired millions of people through the telling of her story in film, as an author, and as a disability rights advocate.[158]

Stephen Hawking was a physicist and cosmologist who achieved world-wide acclaim despite being paralyzed and unable to speak.[159]

Roald Dow,[160] author of children's books and adult fiction, suffered permanent injuries in a fighter plane crash in 1940. He had this to say about chronic illness and pain:[161]

I just want to tell you this: I am an expert on being very ill and having to lie in bed… Like any other business, or any unusual occupation, it's a hell of a tough one to learn. But you know I'm convinced that it has its compensations…

I doubt I would have written a line… unless some minor tragedy had sort of twisted my mind out of the normal rut… I emerged a tiny-philosopher, a fractional philosopher from nothing…

I mean this. I know that serious illness is a good thing for the mind. It is always worth it afterwards. There's something of the yogi about it, with all its self-disciplines and horrors… So take my view and be kind of thankful that it came. And if afterwards, it leaves you with an ache, or a pain, or a slight disability, as it does me, it doesn't matter a damn; at least not to anyone but yourself. And… that is the only unimportant person — oneself.

Pain, illness, and injury may befall you, but they need not define you. You can create a strategy to make the best use of your talents and assets:[162]

Know[3.3-22] Pain, Illness, and Injury Strategies

Find hacks, shortcuts, and workarounds to get things done. Take your limitations into account and make the best use of your talents.

---

[155] https://www.thehealthy.com/genetic-disorders/famous-people-overcame-disability/

[156] https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/cognitive-behavioral-therapy-techniques-for-retraining-your-brain

[157] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche

[158] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Keller

[159] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Hawking

[160] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl

[161] https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/03/03/roald-dahl-storyteller-illness/

[162] Paraphrased from: https://www.chronicillnesswarriorlife.com (site no longer available as of April 2025)

Get organized to streamline your activities and reduce the decisions and choices you must make.

Adopt a healthy mindset of resilience, acceptance, self-compassion, and determination.

Make your physical and mental health a priority.

Know[3.3-23] Keep a Pain Diary[163]

Pain is such an unpleasant and subjective experience that when you suffer from it, you really do not feel like writing about it. And when you do not have it, there is no need to write about it, or you cannot remember the details. That is the nature of pain.

But if you create the habit of keeping a journal or diary of your pain or illness, you can possibly make great headway in alleviating, or at least understanding, your symptoms. Getting the facts on what may trigger your pain or symptoms may help you and your doctor find a workable treatment plan.

When you seek medical aid, one of the first questions is, "When did you first notice it?" You can track these incidents in your regular or daily journal. But if you are prone to dwelling on such things, it may be wise to keep this journal separate. Helpful entries for your pain diary are:

Date and time.
What you were doing, eating, or drinking.
Where you were.
Events or activities preceding and during the pain.
Where the pain occurs in your body.
Describe your pain, such as "sharp", "dull", "aching", etc.
Level of pain, 1-10, with 10 being the worst pain you can endure.
How long the pain lasted.
Other symptoms, such as lack of appetite, sweating, nausea, etc.
Also include your coping strategies and how well they work.
Quality of Life, based on how much pain you are feeling:[164]

0-Stay in bed all day. Feel hopeless and helpless about life.
1-Stay in bed at least half the day; no contact with the outside world.
2-Get out of bed but don't get dressed. Stay at home all day.
3-Get dressed, but minimal activities at home.
4-Simple chores at home. Leave home 2 days a week.
5-Struggle but fulfill daily home responsibilities. No outside activity.
6-Work/volunteer limited hours. Limited social activities on weekends.
7-Work/volunteer a few hours daily. Can be active at least five hours a day.
8-Work/volunteer for at least six hours daily. Active on weekends.
9-Active eight hours daily. Take part in family life. Limited social life.
10-Normal daily activities each day. Active social/family life.

---

[163] Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, chap 17
[164] https://health.gov/hcq/trainings/pathways/assets/pdfs/ QOL_scale.pdf

Coping with Illness and Pain

We must learn to suffer whatever we cannot avoid. Our life is composed, like the harmony of the world, of discords as well as of different tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, soft and loud. If a musician liked only some of them, what could he sing? He has got to know how to use all of them and blend them together. So too must we with good and ill, which are of one substance with our life.

--Montaigne

Know[3.3-24] Consider these three areas in coping with illness and pain:

1. Work with your doctor and care team. The details of Conventional Medicine, Pharmacology, Surgery, and Alternative Medicine are beyond the scope of this book. But it is important that you maintain active participation in any medical treatment.[165]

Talk to your doctor about all your symptoms, medications and any vitamins or dietary supplements you are taking. Keep a pain diary that you can discuss with your doctor.

Do your research. Find out as much as you can concerning your illness or pain, medications, and therapies.

Look for support groups that gather to discuss your type of chronic illness or pain. Support groups provide comfort and reduce feelings of isolation. They are also a great resource for information.

Ask your doctor about Alternative and Complementary treatment, such as seeing a chiropractor, physical therapist, or dietician.

2. Maintain your physical health. Surprisingly, many of the strategies of coping with illness and pain are like those of avoiding them in the first place:[166]

Drink a lot of water.
Get plenty of sleep.
Exercise regularly.
Keep a positive mental attitude.
Eat a nutritious diet.

Note: "exercise" refers to movement okayed by your doctor and that does not make your pain or symptoms worse.

3. Make mental and emotional health a priority. Most people with chronic pain or illness experience depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder as a result. These issues are typically a byproduct of suffering, rather than its cause. But the chances for successful treatment decrease if you believe your pain or illness is psychological in nature. This situation may lessen your chances of getting better.[167]

---

[165] Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, Part III

[166] Maria Johnson, "Pain Relief, The Drug Free Way to Feel Better Fast", 2016, Chap 2

[167] Argoff and Galer, "Defeat Chronic Pain Now", 2010, Chap 17, I added "illness".

It is helpful to consider your psychological approach to illness and pain. This is not to minimize your suffering, but your thoughts and feelings can directly affect your experience of pain. Pain and stress are related:

Pain causes stress.[168] When you feel pain, you resist it. You do not want pain so you try to push it away. You want it to end. It seeps into every facet of your life. It unravels your serenity and eats at your well-being.

Stress magnifies pain, and causes your body to release adrenaline.[169] Adrenaline increases the pain signals sent to your brain, making your perception of pain worse. As a result, you experience more pain.

Reducing stress reduces pain.[170] I should say, rather, that reducing stress may reduce the experience of pain, but I like the simpler sound bite. Meditation may help an individual to accept, allow, and let go of pain. It may not stop the pain, but it can reduce the suffering from pain.

…we know that positive or negative emotions can influence the experience of pain.

--Jason M. Satterfield, Ph.D[171]

Some thoughts and coping mechanisms make you feel better. Others help for a while, but make you feel worse over time. The strategy is to concentrate on helpful thoughts and coping mechanisms, while reducing those that are not helpful.[172]

Know[3.3-25] Things that make you feel worse are:

1. Unhelpful, negative thoughts. These automatic negative thoughts (ANTs[173]) can impact your experience of illness and pain.[174] Examples of unhelpful thoughts are: (See Thought Stopping p. 305)

My life has been ruined.
I will never get better.
I am unable to contribute or work.
I am fragile and need to be taken care of.

2. Excessive rest. Too much rest is bad for the body and can make pain worse.[175] Being sedentary is a health risk, overall.[176] Although pain and illness may lead you to reduce movement, this may have a negative long-term impact on your health.

---

[168] Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, p266
[169] Argoff and Galer, "Defeat Chronic Pain Now", 2010, Chap 17
[170] Letha Hadady, D.AC., "Naturally Pain Free", 2012, p16
[171] https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/cognitive-behavioral-therapy-techniques-for-retraining-your-brain
[172] Mark P. Jensen, "Hypnosis for Chronic Pain Management", 2011
[173] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automatic_negative_thoughts
[174] Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, p266
[175] Mark P. Jensen, "Hypnosis for Chronic Pain Management", 2011
[176] Judy Foreman, "Exercise is Medicine", 2020m Chap 3

3. Overuse of pain reducing medication. There are many types of analgesic medications.[177] Many have side effects, some of them may even increase your pain. Stick to the dosage recommendation or prescription instructions.

4. Protecting an injury is natural, but can be detrimental, depending on the injury or illness. The part of the body you try to protect atrophies, which makes it weak and painful.[178]

Know[3.3-26] Things that make you feel better are:

1. Helpful, positive thoughts. Helpful thoughts must be realistic, or your mind will reject them.[179] Changing your thoughts is difficult, but can be done with persistence. Examples of helpful thoughts are:

I can influence how I feel and how it effects my life.
I can live in accordance with my values regardless of what happens.
I can still participate.
I have value.

Here is an interesting idea.[180] When you feel pain, you automatically label it as "bad" or "not bad". This relates to the stress and pain reaction previously described. If you believe your pain is temporary, or nonlife threatening, your brain automatically dampens down the experience of it.

However, you must know the pain is not serious or life threatening. This comes, not from affirmations, but from knowledge or prior experience of the pain. Do not convince yourself that serious pain is not serious. Some symptoms, such as chest pain, may be mild but indicative of cardiac issues.[181]

2. Movement. If you are sick or injured, stretch and move in accordance with instructions from your doctor or physical therapist. Keeping active prevents deconditioning, and can reduce pain.[182]

3. Emotional support. Pain and illness can bring with them emotions like guilt, shame, anger, fear, and loneliness.[183] Caregivers also experience stress.[184] You may find it helpful to talk to a professional therapist.[185]

4. Live your values to give your life meaning and purpose. Doing so also enlists additional helpful mechanisms of maintaining your activities in spite of your pain.[186] (See Values Clarification p. 166)

5. Meditation and relaxation can help can reduce the experience of pain and discomfort.[187] (See Relaxation for Mindfulness p. 406)

---

177 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analgesic
178 Mark P. Jensen, "Hypnosis for Chronic Pain Management", 2011
179 Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, p268
180 Argoff and Galer, "Defeat Chronic Pain Now", 2010, Chap 17
181 https://www.bjfm.co.uk/gradual-symptoms-of-heart-attack-ignored-for-too-long-by-patients
182 Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, p236
183 Ref to pain: Sarah Anne Shockley, "The Pain Companion", 2018
184 Stuart S.Kassan,MD,FACP, et al, "Chronic Pain for Dummies", 2008, p40
185 Ibid. p39
186 Mark P. Jensen, “Hypnosis for Chronic Pain Management”, 2011, Table 2.2
187 Letha Hadady, D.AC., “Naturally Pain Free”, 2012, p16

Know[3.3-27] End of Life

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire.

--Matthew 26:39

I believe that the manner in which you live your life determines, to a large extent, how you experience death. A shallow life, devoid of meaning and purpose, likely ends the same. But a life lived well is like a string of jewels, where each day magnifies the beauty of those that came before.

Each person's life is like the pattern of a mosaic. Each thing that happened to you is like one tiny stone that fits into the perfected pattern of the mosaic of your life, which has been designed by God.

-- Hazeldon Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", Nov 11

Life on Earth first appeared 3.4 billion years ago.[188] And in those billions of years, there is not one microbe, blade of grass, animal, or human, that has not faced death. Each of the trillions of beings that now live, will die. That includes you. Your body will die, and you will be gone.

We are like vapors, here now but soon gone. We'd better get our lives in order.

--Bill, AA Member (From James 4.14*)*

It is healthy to occasionally consider the somber fact of your own demise. How you live your final moment is a result of 10,000 decisions that led to it. You may choose to live your last days in petulance, bitterness, and bewilderment, belatedly yearning for the happiness and wisdom that passed you by. Or, beginning now, you can live each day with meaning and purpose. Death may come as a terrifying stranger, or the inevitable friend. But death will come. (See Memento Mori p. 421)

Several years ago, I stood at the bedside of a dying man. Struck by cancer in his prime, I had known him for years as a strong, funny, and close friend. Full of life and a brusk vigor, people often found him intimidating. But he was gentle and kind, and a friend to all.

As he lay dying, this man, who had spoken often of "enjoying his journey," took my hand. Weakened by illness, he whispered to me, "I love you, man." Taken aback by this simple and honest admission of sincere friendship, I replied, "I love you, too." That poignant moment has enriched my life since.

Soon after, my friend reached his destination with dignity and grace.

…at the end of your days when you take stock of your life and what it meant, there's really only one thing that matters, and that's how much you loved.

--B.C. Chase, "Planet Pluto"

---

[188] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earliest_known_life_forms

3.4 Mind

The fact is, no man understands anything; when he knows he does not understand, that is his first tottering step—not toward understanding, but toward the capability of one day understanding. -- George MacDonald, "Lilith", 1895

Truth is perfect and complete in itself. It is not something newly discovered; it has always existed. -- Dōgen

Mind Contents

1. About Mind 289
2. Truths About Mind 290
3. The Truth About Truth 292
4. Thinking for Life 294
5. Thinking Errors 318

About Mind

Dare to think for yourself. --Voltaire

One of the greatest shocks of my life was when I understood that my own thoughts were causing most of my misery. It lit me up, not like a light bulb, but a lightning strike. I was hurt and angry that no one had ever told me how to think. But if I am not responsible for my own thoughts, who is? Our mind interprets reality, creates meaning, and shapes our experience of life. Left unexamined, it misleads us into suffering. But when disciplined and grounded in reality, our mind becomes our most powerful ally.

I had to learn that reality exists whether I like it or not. It does not care what I feel, think, or believe. It does not adjust itself to my preferences. Truth is what is real. When I began to accept that, I saw how much of my misery came from arguing with what is.

I also had to face the fact that my mind does not experience reality directly. It guesses, interprets, fills in the blanks, and makes up stories. I used to trust my thoughts as facts. They are not. They are guesses and interpretations.

Once I saw that my thoughts were not facts, I realized that if I did not monitor them, they would control me. When I let them run wild, they fueled fear, resentment, and despair. When I started watching them, I saw patterns I could challenge and change.

Your thoughts are the direct intermediary between your consciousness and the universe. Ugly thoughts make you an ugly person in an ugly world.[1] Beautiful thoughts inspire integrity and nobility in a world created for you.

---

[1] To my dear editor, Cheri: I kept all the "ugly"s, because I lived in that ugly world, and sometimes it still calls to me. I do not want to forget. :-)

It starts with awareness. You cannot change what you will not see. I had to learn to observe my thoughts without getting sucked into them. It is like stepping outside yourself for a moment to see what is really going on.

But just noticing your thoughts is not enough. You also have to ask yourself if they match reality. I learned to ask, "Is this true? Am I seeing things as they are, or as I fear them to be?" When I brought my thinking back into alignment with reality, I found more peace and happiness.

Finally, I learned that my mind is wired to make the same mistakes over and over. It catastrophizes, blames, feels sorry for itself, and spins fairy tales. These are not personal flaws, they are built into the way the mind works. But they can be spotted and corrected if you are paying attention.

> *If you are not changing it, you are choosing it.* --Cheri, AA Member

In this section, you will:

Explore the nature of mind and its errors.
Examine truth and why it matters
Understand how mind shapes experience.
Learn to notice and monitor your thoughts.
Build awareness as a daily skill.
Test your thoughts against reality.
Recognize and correct common thinking errors.

Know[3.4-01] **Truths About Mind**

> *He who can change his thoughts can change his destiny.* --Stephen Crane

I discovered that when I believed my thoughts, I suffered, but that when I didn't believe them, I didn't suffer, and that this is true for every human being.

--Byron Katie, "Loving What Is"

1. Metacognition is the skill of thinking about your thinking.[2] Like any skill, it improves with practice. But unlike most skills, thinking shapes your worldview, self-perception, and emotional life. When left undisciplined, your thoughts create suffering, stress, and unhappiness.

2. Thinking is a tool you use every day. You become so accustomed to it that you forget it is just that, a tool, for navigating life. Think of a mechanic or a plumber who carried their toolbox everywhere. The would be exhausted, never able to rest. That is what you do with your thoughts. You lug them around with you everywhere you go, even when you do not need them.

3. When you dwell on the past or worry about the future, you create your own suffering. Memories are not the past. Worries are not the future. They are mental constructions. Living within them is pointless. They do not exist. You can set those thoughts aside. Consistent practice is the key.

---

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metacognition

4. Your thoughts are models of reality, not reality itself. Like maps, they can be accurate or flawed. Confusing your thoughts with reality is like mistaking the map for the territory.[3]

Their perception is their reality. --Tracy F.

5. Counterproductive thinking leads to problems. Anxiety, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy, and shame are all fueled by stories you tell yourself.

If my serenity is compromised by the circumstances in my life, it wasn't really serenity in the first place. --Lee, AA Member

6. Your thinking becomes entangled with your identity. You "buy into" your thoughts and mistake them for who you are.[4] Challenging your thinking feels like a threat, but thoughts are not you, they are mental events.

Am I one or two? If I cannot live with myself, there must be two of me: the 'I' and the 'self' that 'I' cannot live with. Maybe… only one of them is real.

--Eckhart Tolle, "The Power of Now"

7. The mind is divided. This is not a metaphor, but a neurological fact.[5] Internal conflicts are natural and inevitable.[6] You contain opposing voices, and learning to work with them is part of being human.[7]

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

--Walt Whitman

8. Since your thoughts affect your feelings and behavior, you must monitor them. Awareness allows you to see whether your thinking leads to negativity or supports a better life and a better world.

You can pick roses, or you can pick weeds. --Katie, AA Member

9. The purpose of thinking is to help you live a good life in harmony with reality. When used well, it helps you make sense of the world, solve problems, and engage with life meaningfully. This takes practice, but the rewards are worth the effort.

Suffering is always the effect of wrong thought in some direction. It is an indication that the individual is out of harmony with himself, with the Law of his being.

--James Allen, "As A Man Thinketh"

10. To live well, you must train your thinking to stay as close to reality as possible. Truth is your relationship with what is real. Whether you realize it or not, how you define truth shapes every part of your life.

---

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Map%E2%80%93territory_relation

[4] Andrea Bonior, PhD, "Detox Your Thoughts", 2020

[5] Stephen M. Kosslyn, PhD and G. Wayne Miller, "Top Brain Bottom Brain"

[6] Matthieu Ricard, Wolf Singer, "Beyond the Self, Conversations Between Buddhism and Neuroscience", 2017

[7] David Gregson and Jay S. Efran, PhD, "The Tao of Sobriety", 2002

Know[3.4-02] **The Truth About Truth**

God, help me see the truth, no matter what it is.

--Cole, AA Member

When you say something is true, you mean it represents or conforms to reality in some way.[8] The idea of truth is talked about in many areas, such as philosophy, art, religion, jurisprudence, and science. But in the end, most people define truth as what matches what is really happening in the world around them. This is called the correspondence theory of truth, or objective truth.[9] People often believe science is the ultimate search for truth, but even science can be distorted by social pressures, politics,[10] or fraud.[11]

Understanding your own idea of truth affects every part of your life. It shapes your beliefs, values, ethics, and the choices you make. Without a clear sense of what is true for you, you become vulnerable to false information, manipulation, and bad decisions. When you take time to examine what you believe and why, you create a foundation for a more authentic, satisfying life.

We live inside a box of space and time created by our own minds. Everything we think we know about the universe depends on that box.

--Hazelden Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", March 23

Here is how different definitions of truth affect your experience of reality. Three umpires discussed how they call balls and strikes. The first umpire said, "I call them as they are." The second said, "I call them as I see them." And the third said, "They ain't nothing until I call them." Three umpires. Three definitions of truth. Your understanding of truth defines reality as something you either discover, perceive, or decide. It is fundamental.

The First Umpire-Objective Truth: The first umpire, who said, "I call them as they are," represents objective truth. This is the truth based on facts and evidence. It can be proven or disproven through observation and testing. Objective truth is the same for everyone. The first umpire believes that truth is what can be observed and measured, and that is what guides his calls. This type of truth describes the real world as it is.

Objective truth is observable, measurable, and verifiable. It is real life, cause-and-effect, and logical outcomes. It is the pain in your foot when you kick a stone.[12] It is the inevitable aftermath of bad decisions. As this quote describes, objective truth is the hard reality we bump into whether we like it or not:

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.

--Philip K. Dick

---

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correspondence_theory_of_truth

10 https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/science-has-always-been-inseparable-from-politics/

11 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mWwXO_guHk

12 https://www.irishphilosophy.com/2016/03/12/berkeleys-immaterialism/

The Second Umpire-Subjective Truth: The second umpire, who said, "I call them as I see them," represents subjective truth. This is truth based on personal experience and perception. It is what we feel and believe to be true based on our own emotions, experiences, and worldview. Subjective truth can vary from person to person. The second umpire believes that what he sees is the truth, and that is what guides his calls. This type of truth makes sense of our experiences in a personal and meaningful way.

Subjective truth is your internal truth. It is your personal picture of the world. You can hold a subjective truth that does not align with objective truth. Sooner or later, it will cause you suffering. I think of subjective truth as a personal interpretation of objective truth. It helps you create meaning and understanding in real life. It is something that is true for you, but may not be true for someone else. The following quote illustrates subjective truth:

My truth does not have to be your truth...
as I read and learn and change, my truth changes, too.

--Marcelle, AA Member

The Third Umpire-Constructed Truth: The third umpire, who said, "They ain't nothing until I call them," represents constructed truth. This is truth based on societal and cultural norms. It is created and reinforced by the people and systems around us. Constructed truth can change over time and vary from place to place. The third umpire believes that truth is what he decides it to be, and that is what guides his calls. This type of truth immerses us in the social and cultural context in which we live.

Constructed truth can only be seen through the cooperative lens of society or groups within society. It is, in part, the cultural adhesive that binds people together. A form of constructed truth is postmodernism.[13] Postmodernism rejects tradition and objective truth. It supports relativism and claims that truth is a construction of culture. The following quote illustrates postmodern, constructed truth:

All knowledge is relational...
Things cannot be known objectively; they must be known subjectively.

--Rochelle Gutierrez

It is important to understand these different ideas of "truth":

Confusing your subjective truth or socially constructed truth with objective truth can cause you internal conflict, relationship problems, emotional pain, and maladaptive behavior.

You can be manipulated when media and public figures influence your definitions of truth. This is not a mistake. Deceptive individuals seek to influence you by changing what you think is true.

It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

--Krishnamurti

---

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism

Objective truth does not automatically dictate a specific moral course in response. The course of action must be decided by individuals and communities, drawing on a collective sense of ethics and shared values. Decisions and behavior should be based on facts, but are not directly determined by them in any mathematical or scientific way.

You cannot derive an "ought" from an "is".

--[Associated with] David Hume, "A Treatise of Human Nature"

Your subjective truths will serve you best when they do not contradict objective truth. Subjective truths are your experience of objective reality. There are many reasons that you (and I, and other people) hold truths that may be contrary to objective truth. Egocentric thinking often makes it easier for an individual to redefine truth to better fit their worldview:[14]

It's true because I believe it.
It's true because we believe it.
It's true because I want to believe it.
It's true because I have always believed it.
It's true because it is in my selfish interest to believe it.

I see everything through rose colored glasses, whatever I want or need to see. And that's usually not what's real. --Meishelle, AA Member

To summarize the Truth About Truth:

Constructed truth is how SOCIETY sees the world.
Subjective truth is how YOU see the world.
Objective truth IS the world.

Thinking for Life

It's remarkable how much long-term advantage people like us have gotten by trying to be consistently not stupid, instead of trying to be very intelligent.

--Charles Munger

After working on this section for seven months, I scrapped most of it and started over. If you have read my story, you know that my ego works hard to protect my need to be "good and smart." From that viewpoint, a section called Mind had to be packed with instructions on critical thinking, learning, and remembering. But when the flow of words ground to a shuddering halt, I realized I had tripped over my ego again. I was on the wrong track. And that may be the perfect segue into this section on mind and thinking.

The ideas that follow are the result of my own research and effort to list simple methods to raise awareness and manage internal mental states. These suggestions are not meant to replace professional help. They are tools to help you manage the contents of your own mind, so you can live better each day. It is through your mind that you form your perception of reality. It is that view of reality, not reality itself, that you react to.

---

[14] Dr. Richard Paul, Dr. Linda Elder, "The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking", 2019, p52

Errors in thinking give you a distorted view of reality. When your picture of the world is false, you suffer. Until you accept that the real problem is your thinking, you cannot make progress. You are only fixing the symptoms, not the problem itself. You become a victim of your own false perceptions.

Know[3.4-03] Managing Your Thoughts

Failure to manage your thoughts results in emotional pain.[15] When you are unable to effectively manage your thoughts, they can lead to a downward spiral of negative emotions and mental distress. This causes anxiety, depression, and even physical symptoms and health issues.

When your thoughts run rampant, they trigger strong emotions, and you are at the mercy of circumstances.[16] This results in an incredible drain of mental, physical, and emotional energy.[17] You always feel exhausted. Some people alleviate this pain with harmful substances or behaviors. Sooner or later, there are long-term detrimental effects.

You will initially struggle to manage your thoughts. This is a necessary part of the process. Only after you have exerted significant effort will your unconscious mind internalize and integrate these techniques. As you continue to practice, managing your thoughts becomes easier.[18]

Changing your thoughts directly impacts your worldview and your sense of self.[19] It requires immense effort and self-reflection to reshape ingrained beliefs.[20] It can be uncomfortable and unsettling. You will be questioning long-held assumptions and confronting ideas you have held all your life.

Managing your thoughts physically alters your brain. Meditation and mindfulness practices positively impact brain chemistry and promote well-being.[21] Research has shown that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and similar techniques change brain structure and function.[22] Changing your thoughts changes your brain.[23]

In relation to your thoughts, I have used the terms "control", "change", and "manage" interchangeably. In truth, you cannot change a thought that has already entered your mind. But by monitoring and restructuring your thoughts, it becomes less likely that similar thoughts enter your awareness.[24] It is a gradual process. Be patient. With effort, progress is inevitable.

---

[15] https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-to-deal-with-emotional-pain#in-the-moment-techniques

[16] https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/emotional-triggers

[17] Thanks to Monica, AA Member, for reminding me of this

[18] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intentional-insights/201604/how-manage-your-thoughts-feelings-and-behaviors

[19] https://news.stanford.edu/report/2021/09/15/mindsets-clearing-lens-life/

[20] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/finding-purpose/201810/what-actually-is-belief-and-why-is-it-so-hard-change

[21] https://neurosciencenews.com/memory-meditation-23414/

[22] https://www.lukincenter.com/cognitive-behavioral-therapy-and-neuroplasticity-how-cbt-changes-your-brain/

[23] https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.853804/full

[24] https://tom-stevenson.medium.com/what-we-think-is-what-we-become-df58a698de99

Keep in mind the Cognitive Triangle, an idea borrowed from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy[25], and discussed in Knowledge-Doing. It shows the relationship between your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Visualize a triangle where the top angle represents your thoughts, and the bottom right and left angles represent your feelings and behavior. Your thoughts influence your feelings, which influence your actions. In the same way, your behavior influences your thoughts and feelings. Negative thoughts lead to negative emotions, which lead to negative behavior. By interrupting the cycle at any point, thoughts, feelings, or behavior, you bring about positive change.

Fake it till you make it. --Recovery Slogan

Have realistic expectations.[26] The self-help industry sometimes pushes the idea of a "magic solution". This makes people feel inadequate if they experience only moderate improvements. In reality, your background and genetics will always influence your mental well-being. A balanced approach acknowledges these limitations, but continues to focus on real improvement.

Know[3.4-04] When to Seek Professional Help

Speak to a qualified therapist or counselor if you have any of these (or other serious) issues:[27]

Severe depression.
Mood swings.
Substance abuse issues.
A history of psychiatric hospitalization.
Having been diagnosed with psychosis.
Impulse control issues.
Thoughts of harming yourself or others.
Self-destructive behavior (drinking, drugs, gambling, etc.).
Head trauma with mood, personality, or cognitive changes.
Dissociative disorders.
Eating disorders.

Changing your thoughts takes time and effort. You are undertaking a task which few people have the courage to pursue. But through this process, true growth and self-discovery occur. Mistakes and minor setbacks are part of it.

Thinking for Life is the process of monitoring and improving your thinking over time. It has two steps. The first is awareness. The second is harmony. Only after you have identified a thought as not useful, through awareness, can you restructure or reframe it into a more productive one. Techniques to change your thoughts include challenging their validity, finding evidence for a more realistic perspective, or replacing them with more empowering beliefs. Over time, you will reduce much of your mental chatter and live a more peaceful life. Be patient and courageous. No one can do it for you. And no one can do it better than you.

---

[25] https://hudsontherapygroup.com/blog/cognitive-triangle
[26] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbn5MoO6ejE&list=WL&index=5&t=1293s
[27] Patricia Farrell, Ph.D., "How to be Your Own Therapist", 2003

Awareness

Being aware is being alive.

--Linda, AA Member

Most people, even though they don't know it, are asleep. They're born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up.

--Anthony de Mello, S.J., "Awareness"

You can become so habituated and comfortable in your thinking that you do not realize when your thinking is counterproductive. Or, surprisingly, you can be so invested in your thinking that you hang onto it even when it causes you pain. You are not alone in this. The majority of people think that way.

The first step to change your thinking is awareness. Awareness is a process in which you become conscious of your thoughts. Without this beautiful spark, you are stuck in a trance-like state that only resembles the real world.[28] Lacking awareness, you are like a machine, reacting only to circumstances. You have little possibility for growth or change.

To be effective, activating awareness must be simple and quick. You must train yourself to trigger awareness throughout the day. There is no substitute for this. Awareness is a short mental pause that no one else would notice. But it is enough time for you to insert a wedge into your automatic thinking.

Know[3.4-05] How to Trigger Awareness

The most obvious trigger to awareness is to ask yourself a question. Use any question that "wakes you up". You want to register your internal state. Change your question any time. Since awareness is a disruption of your automatic thinking, simple questions work best. Try starting with "yes or no" questions. Consider the following:

Am I okay? Instead of the usual reflex, "I'm fine," pause and reflect. This question covers mental, emotional, and physical states. Do not rush past it.

Am I calm? Check your emotional state. You do not need to feel calm all the time, but you do need to notice when you are not.

What's the story? Step back and look at the big picture. Consider how thoughts of your past, present, and future exist in patterns.

What am I thinking? Your thoughts create your reality. You are responsible for directing them. Use this question to take control instead of drifting.

What am I feeling? All feelings are valid. Identifying them helps you understand your responses and their triggers.

Is this thought useful? If your thinking is repetitive, negative, and unproductive, it is not useful. Recognizing this breaks the loop.

---

[28] John F. Schumaker, "The Corruption of Reality", 1995, p24-25

My default setting is negative. --Faith, AA Member

Why am I thinking about this? Notice how often your thoughts wander to things that do not matter in the moment. Most are distractions, not insights.

Of the hundred billion thoughts I've had in my life, 99% of them were bullshit. --TA

I am thinking…?[29] can be used to identify vague thoughts that make you feel unpleasant, but that you cannot quite put your finger on. Repeat it to yourself in contemplation, and leave a space for the thought to appear.

Know[3.4-06] More Ways to Trigger Awareness

It can be difficult at first to remember to use awareness questions. That is normal. Until the habit takes hold, it is helpful to use artificial prompts. Here are a few ways to make awareness more automatic:

Journaling: Record your thoughts and emotions regularly. Over time, this reveals patterns and distortions you may not notice in the moment.

Identify Triggers: Notice the situations that lead to strong emotions or negative thinking. These are signals to pause and examine your thoughts.

Use Reminders: Set alarms, leave sticky notes, or place visual cues in your environment to prompt mental check-ins.

Change Something: Wear a ring on a different finger, switch wrists for your watch, or move everyday objects. These small shifts interrupt autopilot and trigger reflection - just be sure to change them frequently.

Practice Consistently: Like any skill, awareness improves with repetition. Set aside time daily or weekly to review and refine your thinking.

Celebrate Progress: When you catch and correct distorted thoughts, acknowledge the win. Positive reinforcement builds momentum.

Conclusion to Awareness

Awareness tools overlap with many other practices in 12 Steps to a Good Life. Disrupting automatic thinking is essential to living better. It supports habit formation, helps with your Step work, and deepens your spiritual practice. Learning to interrupt your mental autopilot helps you stay in the present moment and make better choices. When paired with daily routines, they make every thought clearer, and your actions more intentional.

When you train yourself to wake up to your thoughts, half the battle is won. But awareness is not enough. The next step is to bring those thoughts into harmony with reality. This means examining them, and challenging them when necessary. Harmonizing your thoughts is one of the greatest things you can do for your own happiness and peace of mind.

---

[29] Warren Archer, "I Think, Therefore I Lie", 2018

Harmony

One must be sane to think clearly, but one can think deeply and be quite insane.

--Nikola Tesla

I crave clarity.

--Amanda, AA Member

The tools for harmonious thinking are practical and easy to understand. Some will work for you better than others. None of them will work if you do not use them. They are in no particular order, with the exception of the first two, which form the foundation for all the others.

[You might know what to do] …but you gotta do it.

--Marcelle, AA Member

Know[3.4-07] Prayer

When you pray with devotion and intensity, it creates a sense of inner peace and focus. You connect with your Higher Power. I try to make prayer my go-to when thinking causes me problems. It takes effort and practice.

Did you pray about it?

--Angie Carter CRADC, SAP

A good place to start is with the Serenity Prayer:[30]
(See The Serenity Prayer p. 396)

God, grant me the serenity to
Accept the things I cannot change
The courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Another helpful prayer is called the Set-Aside Prayer.[31] It emphasizes having the humility to see things in a new way. There are no set words for it. Focus on your intention. Be spontaneous, to fit the situation. Speak from your heart and in your own words. Here is an example:[32]

God, today help me set aside everything I think I know about You, everything I think I know about myself, everything I think I know about others, and everything I think I know about the world, so I may have an open mind and a new experience with all these things. Please help me see the truth.

Sincere, spontaneous prayer is as effective as any other, and often more so. Make up your own prayers as you need them. After I pray, I use the other tools included here, because my Higher Power has given me many tools to live a better life.

Lifting it to God makes me stronger. --Greg, AA Member

---

[30] https://russ-w.medium.com/how-the-serenity-prayer-can-change-your-life-ffcc52208c18

[31] I first heard about this from Stephanie, AA Member

[32] Modified from: https://www.manhattancbt.com/archives/2001/set-aside-prayer/

Know[3.4-08] Focus[33]

Our attention spans are under attack. We're in the age of infinite content. We need to actively protect and strengthen our attention focus. Attention is a muscle you can strengthen.

--sams.kicking.gram

Improving your focus is not complicated. It begins by directing your attention to a task or activity for increasing lengths of time without allowing distraction. None of the tools in this book will help if you cannot maintain focus. Try these methods:

Reduce stimulation. Set aside time each day without music, screens, or external input. Let your mind settle.

Do focus-based physical activities that require concentration, such as balancing, holding a sustained grip, or maintaining a plank.

Practice meditation. Start with a few minutes. Increase gradually. Consider a daily meditation challenge and notice how your attention improves.

Know[3.4-09] Take Action

Take some action, no matter how small or seemingly trivial, to change the situation, and thereby change your thoughts.[34] Taking action helps you gain momentum, build confidence, and create positive change in your life. Start small with a simple task immediately in front of you. Wash the dishes, make your bed, take a shower, or do the laundry.

Know[3.4-10] Let Go of Unproductive Thoughts

Try this simple rule: if your thoughts are about someone or something or some event that is not in the same room with you, other than obvious and necessary exceptions, then that thought is nonproductive. And if you know a thought is nonproductive, you can let go of it. Just say, "I do not need to think about this." Then, switch your attention to something else.

Know[3.4-11] Be Sure There is a Solution

Many of the things you worry about may be beyond your control, or a misperception. You may be thinking about the wrong problem, or in the wrong way. You may have been misled by the news[35] or media.[36] Do not waste your time and energy trying to solve a problem that either has no solution, or is a misstatement of something else.

Know[3.4-12] Avoid Thinking Traps About Other People

When you think about another individual who is not living the way you think is right, or good for them, then you are wasting time and energy. Treat yourself and others with compassion. Everyone must travel their own path, as you travel yours. (See Codependency p. 445)

---

[33] https://www.instagram.com/direct/t/17849576753663377/

[34] https://www.livingopenhearted.com/post/how-small-actions-can-make-big-changes

[35] Bernard Goldberg, "Bias", 2002

[36] Diane Ravitch, "The Language Police", 2003

Know[3.4-13] Accept Discomfort and Uncertainty

Whining and complaining is a form of resistance that signifies fear. You are afraid of admitting weakness, or powerlessness, or taking responsibility.[37] You are afraid of not living up to your own expectations, or the expectations of others for you. There is only one way forward, and you can do this in small steps: admit your discomfort; accept that you do not know everything; embrace your imperfect humanity.

Know[3.4-14] Have a Quiet Time Every Day

This has been known since ancient times.[38] From my personal experience and insights shared by others, daily prayer and meditation are life-changing. It is not an easy habit, but it is, perhaps, one of the healthiest habits to work on. The results are truly transformative.

We must have many quiet times when we not so much ask to be shown and led by God, as to feel and realize His presence.

--Hazeldon Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", April 23

Know[3.4-15] Think High Thoughts

Some years ago, I had the idea that I can think thoughts of Heaven, or I can think thoughts of Earth. Other than a vague intuition, I had no idea what that meant. Now, I realize that we have had "high thoughts" available to us for thousands of years, in religious and contemplative traditions. You can carry these thoughts with you from your daily readings. Write them down, or simply consider their meaning through the day. Every "heavenly" thought of humility, gratitude, and awe, replaces an "earthly" thought of worry, fear, or resentment. (See Chronos and Kairos p. 219)

Here is a prayer I use to help me let go of superficial concerns and concentrate on what is most important, my spirituality. Notice that this prayer has a syllabic count identical to 4-7-8 breathing. Studies show that combining prayer and meditative breathing has powerful physical and mental health benefits.[39] (See Core Practices and Techniques p. 394)

I beseech you.
With open and humble heart.
Make me worthy of your presence.

Know[3.4-16] Look for the Seed of Joy

In my daily readings and Inner Focus, of late, I have become aware of a tiny spark deep within myself. I call it "the seed of joy". It is independent of anything happening in my life. I think of it as a tiny candle flame in the vast dark of the universe. Perhaps it is akin to the mustard seed of the sacred texts. I believe it is a cumulative effect of Inner Focus and trying to live well. It is not always there. But I nurture and cherish it when I can.

---

[37] Patricia Farerell, Ph.D., "How to Be Your Own Therapist", p104-105
[38] https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-meditation/
[39] https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/prayer

Know[3.4-17] Let Go of the Past and Future

Letting go does not mean forgetting or ignoring. Suppressing painful thoughts or memories can do more harm than good.[40] If you are experiencing serious anxiety or depression, seek professional help.

When your mind drifts to the past, do not re-live the pain.[41] Focus on what strength or insight you gained. Even small lessons are worth holding on to.

Pain comes from resisting the present moment.[42] When you reject what is happening now, you suffer. If you believe you are your mind, you stay trapped. But when you realize you are not your mind, you find peace.

You need time and thought to function in the world, but when they dominate your life, they cause disconnection. You lose touch with your Higher Power, who is only found in the present.

Dwelling on the past or future is a habit you can break. The present moment is all you ever truly have. Make it your focus. Bring your attention back to now. Visit the past or future only when necessary, and let life unfold.

Know[3.4-18] Do Something that Makes You Happy

Music has a powerful effect on the mind. A cheerful song can change your perspective. It does not have to be loud or fast, just something to pick you up. Whether it is music, a walk outside, a favorite movie, or something creative, do something that brings you joy. Even a small moment of happiness can change the direction of your day.

Know[3.4-19] Work the Steps

Many painful thoughts are based on regrets of the past or fear of the future. The 12 Steps are perfect to guide you through cleaning up past mistakes and facing an uncertain future. I use these Steps when I am overwhelmed by my thoughts and feelings. They are also a great example of how you can tailor the Steps to work on other problems and issues.

12 Steps for Thoughts and Feelings

1. I am powerless over my thoughts and feelings.
2. My Higher Power can restore me to sanity and emotional health.
3. Turn my thoughts and feelings over to my Higher Power.
4. Inventory my thoughts and feelings.
5. Admit what I found.
6. Be ready to change my thoughts and feelings.
7. Humbly ask my Higher Power to help me change.
8. List the harm caused by my thoughts and feelings.
9. Make amends where possible.
10. Continue to inventory my thoughts and feelings.
11. Pray and meditate.
12. Continue these Steps and make the world better.

---

[40] Clayton E. Tucker-Ladd, Ph.D., "Psychological Self-Help", Chap 14
[41] Patricia Farrel, Ph.D., "How To Be Your Own Therapist", p157
[42] Eckhart Tolle, "The Power of Now", 1999, Chap 2

Know[3.4-20] Practice Mindfulness:[43]

Mindfulness means bringing your attention to the present moment. I used to find this idea confusing, until I realized how much mental fog comes from constant thinking. Many mindfulness techniques are vague, but these three are specific and easy to try:

Relax your tongue: You can calm your mind by relaxing your jaw and gently touching your tongue to the roof of your mouth. This disengages the brain's language center, since even silent thinking involves tiny tongue movements.

Focus on two sensations: Pick two points on your body and feel both at once, such as both feet or hands. Try rubbing the thumb and index finger together on each hand, noticing the fine sensations.

Use peripheral vision: Hakalau, a Hawaiian technique, expands your visual field. Start with a single point, then open awareness to your side vision. This activates the right brain and often dissolves tension.

Know[3.4-21] Open a Space in Your Thoughts[44]

Here is a simple, beautiful technique:

Close your eyes and observe your thoughts without judgment. Do not try to control them, just notice them flowing through your mind.

Ask yourself: "What is my next thought?" Then wait patiently for the next thought to emerge. Notice the gap between thoughts.

Continue this openness, waiting for the next thought to come forward.

Remain open and receptive. You can repeat, "What is my next thought?"

Recognize that space between your thoughts. When you wait for the thought… there is no thought.

Know[3.4-22] Do Not Be So Serious:[45]

Play my tricks
Fragile mind
--Low Roar, "Don't Be So Serious", 2017

Sharing in a meeting, I put my self-pity on display as I bemoaned the fact of not getting a job I had applied for. A little man with huge thick glasses, who almost never spoke (we called him "Chatty Bob"), laughed at my story… and I was enraged at his reaction. Yet I soon realized that he had done me a great favor (which I later thanked him for).

When you take yourself too seriously, you open the door to a dangerous dance between self-pity and fragility. Your heightened sense of personal importance turns every setback into a blow to your ego. Viewing challenges as personal slights can snowball into fragile self-pity. You become like delicate glass, liable to shatter under the weight of life's inevitable adversities.

---

[43] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7gLaAiGR-o&t=179s
[44] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaC1c5L1ZRg
[45] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IB1URcYIaOE

Do not be afraid to laugh at yourself and your situation. There is the old adage, "five years from now you will laugh at this." Do not wait five years, and do not be afraid to admit self-indulgence. Self-pity and self-indulgence are vastly different than self-compassion. They are poison to your soul. Do not allow them to take root in your thoughts.

Know[3.4-23] Invert, Always Invert[46]

Inversion is flipping a thought to see if it reveals another truth. To invert a thought, restate it from the opposite perspective, often by reversing roles or ownership. Any thought, positive, negative, or neutral, can be flipped in this way.[47] Inverting serves two purposes: it reminds you that thoughts are not your identity, and it helps you reframe them into (possibly) more constructive ones.[48] When you invert, you detach. You step back and see your part in things. You regain power over automatic thoughts.

Here are ten examples of common thoughts, inverted for insight:

Original: *You do not care about me.*
Inverted: *You do not care about me in the way I want.*

Original: *You do not understand me.*
Inverted: *I do not understand you.*

Original: *You are always judging me.*
Inverted: *I am always judging you.*

Original: *You make me feel insecure.*
Inverted: *I make you feel insecure.*

Original: *You are the reason I am stressed.*
Inverted: *I am the reason I am stressed.*

Original: *You do not support me.*
Inverted: *You do not support me in the way that I want.*

Original: *You are holding me back.*
Inverted: *I am holding myself back.*

Original: *You never listen to me.*
Inverted: *I never listen to you.*

Original: *You are causing all the problems.*
Inverted: *I am causing all the problems.*

Original: *You are not making me happy.*
Inverted: *I am not making me happy.*

These reversals are not meant to shift blame. They are tools for ownership, self-awareness, and growth. They help you take responsibility for your thoughts. Try inverting your next strong thought. Examine it carefully for any grain of truth. You may be surprised at what you find.

---

[46] https://modelthinkers.com/mental-model/inversion
[47] Warren Archer, "I Think, Therefore I Lie", 2018
[48] Byron Katie, "Loving What Is", 2002

Thought Stopping[49]

Thought Stopping is often confused with thought suppression.[50] Thought Stopping is interrupting your own thought patterns. Thought suppression is trying not to think about something. The first is healthy, the latter is not.[51] Studies on thought stopping show it is effective against problematic thoughts. Thought Stopping is part of the "ABC process" (below) and has been found to be effective on anxiety, depression, and phobias. If, however, you need professional help, get professional help.

Know[3.4-24] Thought Stopping versus Thought Suppression

Thought Stopping is an active process to interrupt problematic thoughts and replace them with thoughts that are healthier, more productive, and more realistic. You accept the thought, realize it is not helpful, and replace it with another thought.

Thought Suppression, though sometimes a conscious process, is more automatic. You do not want to think of something, so you find any distraction away from it. You try not to accept the thought, or even think it. This is a common, but unhealthy, process.[52]

One of the most common ways people suppress painful thoughts is through substances or compulsive behavior. Alcohol, drugs, food, sex, gambling, screen time, or even overworking can all become tools of avoidance. These behaviors offer short-term relief but prevent long-term healing. Instead of facing the thought, you numb it. But the pain is still there, waiting. Suppression through compulsion is a personal disaster.

Know[3.4-25] To use Thought Stopping:

Become aware of the negative or distressing thoughts. This takes courage and persistence.

Select a trigger word or action that you associate with stopping or interrupting thoughts. This could be a word like "stop" or "cancel" or a physical action like snapping your fingers.

When you notice a negative thought, immediately say your chosen trigger word aloud or perform the chosen action. The idea is to create a sudden break in the thought process.

After stopping the negative thought, intentionally replace it with a positive or neutral thought. This could be a positive affirmation or a thought that counteracts the negativity. (See Affirmations p. 314)

Practice thought stopping consistently. If the negative thoughts persist, repeat the process as necessary. Over time, this can help retrain your thought patterns. Be patient with yourself. Self-compassion is part of the process.

---

[49] https://www.verywellmind.com/stop-technique-2671653

[50] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thought_stopping#Misconceptions

[51] Clayton E. Tucker-Ladd, PhD, "Psychological Self-Help", 2009, Chap 12

[52] https://www.verywellmind.com/thought-suppression-and-ocd-2510480

Know[3.4-26] RaDaR

RaDaR is a simple tool to deal with difficult or upsetting thoughts. It stands for Reflect, Describe, Respond. It creates space between what you think and do. It is not a tool to control your thoughts, but to respond intelligently instead of reacting on autopilot. (See pages 116, 218, 260, 306, 384, 447, 788)

Reflect on what is happening in your mind. Pause and observe your thoughts without trying to control or change them. What just occurred? What are you thinking right now? Are these thoughts familiar, or do they surprise you? Are you replaying a conversation, imagining a future scenario, judging yourself or others? Are you stuck on something from the past? Just observe; do not judge or try to "fix" your thoughts. Do not think, "I shouldn't think like that," because you already have! Instead, simply notice your mental content. Reflection makes you aware of thoughts that often go unexamined. You cannot change your response to a thought you do not acknowledge.

Describe your thoughts clearly and honestly. Use plain, direct language. For example: "I am thinking that I failed," "I am thinking that I cannot handle this," "I am thinking that this person is against me." Avoid explaining, defending, or justifying. Do not try to make the thought sound better than it is. Just say what is there. You can also describe the pattern: "My thoughts are looping," "I am catastrophizing," "I am blaming." By naming the thought or pattern, you create distance from it. You begin to see that your thoughts are not reality. They are representations, and they can be questioned.

Respond by choosing how you want to engage with the thought. Ask yourself, "Is this thought helpful or harmful?" "Is it based in fact or assumption?" "Does it reflect my values and the kind of person I want to be?" Then decide what to do. You might challenge the thought, reframe it, set it aside, or replace it with something more constructive. You might simply write it down and move on. A wise response does not always involve action, it involves discernment. You are no longer being pulled by the current of thought. You are steering your mind with intention and clarity.

Know[3.4-27] Breathing Techniques

Breathing is the one autonomic function you can consciously alter at will, giving you a direct entry point to reset your body's physiological state. When stress hits, breath patterns shift automatically into shallow, rapid chest breathing, keeping the nervous system locked in fight-or-flight mode. By taking control of the rhythm, you immediately signal safety to the brain, slowing the heart rate and clearing room for sharper cognitive focus.

Breathing techniques offer concrete ways to put this into practice. Whether you need to break a sudden loop of anxiety, sharpen your attention before a difficult task, or settle down into a deeper meditation session, these methods provide a practical, repeatable toolkit for shifting your internal state in real time. (See Core Practices and Techniques, p. 394)

Know[3.4-28] Know your ABCs[53]

When I finally "got it," that many of my thoughts were wrong, I realized that they were the source of most of my misery. My thoughts triggered painful feelings. My feelings led to self-sabotaging actions, creating more painful feelings. And the cycle repeated. Over and over. For decades. And all of it was based on distorted, untrue, unnecessary thoughts.

The ABC model helps break the automatic cycle between what happens, what you believe, how you feel, and how you act. It also gives you a way to interrupt that cycle and steer it in a better direction. Here is how it works:

A - Activating Event: Something happens. It might be external, like receiving criticism, being ignored, getting rejected, or watching someone else succeed. Or it might be internal, like remembering a past failure, thinking about the future, or noticing a body sensation that triggers anxiety. Example: You get a short, vague text from a friend who usually sends long, cheerful messages.

B - Belief: Your mind instantly forms a belief or interpretation about the event. These automatic thoughts can be rational or distorted. Irrational beliefs are often extreme, rigid, or self-defeating. Example: "They are mad at me. I must have done something wrong. Nobody wants to deal with me anymore." This step is crucial. Most people skip over it and think they are just "feeling bad," when the real driver is the belief hiding behind the emotion. (See Thinking Errors p. 318)

C - Consequence: This is how you feel and act in response to the belief. It includes emotional reactions (like anxiety, sadness, anger) and behavioral patterns (like withdrawal, aggression, self-sabotage). Example: You feel hurt, avoid replying, and spend the rest of the day ruminating or isolating.

D - Dispute: Challenge the belief. Ask, "Is this thought true? Do I have evidence? Is there another way to interpret this?" You might even write it out or speak it aloud. Treat the belief like a witness on trial, press for facts. Example: "There could be a hundred reasons for that short message. Maybe they are tired. Maybe they are distracted. Maybe it is not about me at all."

E - Effect: What new belief or outlook can you carry forward? How do you feel and behave differently? Do not skip this step, or the process is useless. Give credit to the changed effect and behavior. Example: "I feel calmer. I can reach out tomorrow and connect without panic."

Thoughts happen fast. Sometimes you have to notice the consequence, and then work backward. Write it down. Do not just "think" it through. Use a notebook or phone. Track your thoughts during the day and finish at night with your Step 10. Make it a habit. The more you practice, the easier it gets.

When you feel bad, put your thoughts on the pad.

--Wilson & Branch, "Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Dummies"

---

[53] The technical framework for this part is from Rob Willson and Rhena Branch, " Cognitive Behavioural Therapy For Dummies", 2006

Know[3.4-29] Self-talk[54]

Self-talk, a form of communicating with yourself, involves a single internal voice, rather than multiple voices. It can be neutral, positive, or negative.

Positive self-talk involves viewing yourself in a positive light. It is linked to various mental health benefits, such as higher self-esteem, improved well-being, and a reduction in depression and personality disorders.

Negative self-talk tends to overly criticize your shortcomings, often rooted in early feedback, particularly from parents. It can adversely affect your mental health, inducing negative moods, stress, anxiety, and depression. Despite the misery it causes, it is actually your mind trying to help you,[55] using maladaptive lessons you learned in childhood.

Your inner critic can be a deep destructive force that often stays hidden.[56] It does not always speak in clear negative messages. Instead, it shows up when you experience pleasure, love, recognition, or success, and reacts by undermining those moments. Its goal is to prevent joy, pride, and connection. To recognize it, pay attention to what happens when you feel good. Especially notice if your self-sabotage is tied to physical pleasure, emotional intimacy, or success. Your inner critic cannot tolerate these.

You can change your self-talk with diligent practice. Make a list of some of those terrible things you say to yourself, and replace them with realistic, healthy thoughts. These examples are from a list I made many years ago:

Replace this phrase: *I can't…*
With: *It may be difficult, but I'll find a way if I want it, and it is possible.*

Replace this phrase: *I have to…*
With: *I want to…* or *I choose to…*

Replace this phrase: *I should…* or *I need to…*
With: *I can* or *I may if I want to, it is my choice.*

Replace this phrase: *I should have…* or *I shouldn't have…*
With: *I made a mistake, but I can learn from it.*

Replace this phrase: *Yeah, but…*
With: *I'll think about it carefully and then make a decision.*

Replace this phrase: *I don't have a choice!*
With: *I do have a choice, and I'll look at the costs and benefits first.*

If you remember anything, remember this phrase, "Don't should on yourself."[57] Words and phrases like "should", "ought to", "have to", and "need to" put burdens on you without accomplishing anything. They create inner conflict. They are open-ended obligations, rarely resolved.

---

[54] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intrapersonal_communication#Positive_and_negative_self-talk

[55] Rik Isensee, "Shut Yourself Up", 2013

[56] Beverly Engel, "Healing Your Emotional Self", 2006

[57] https://keithedwards.com/2012/11/08/dont-should-on-yourself/

Know[3.4-30] Reframing

Cognitive reframing involves shifting your interpretation of a situation, emphasizing a change in the way it is viewed or understood.[58] It is like putting on a new pair of glasses to see things differently. You can often do this by changing one word or idea in your thoughts. Here are some examples:

Judging or Learning:[59] Instead of approaching a situation with judgment, focusing on what is wrong or who is to blame, look at the situation as an opportunity to learn. These approaches are defined by the questions you ask:

From a Judging perspective: *Whose fault is it? What's wrong with me? Why am I such a failure? Why is everybody so stupid and frustrating? Why bother?*

From a Learning Perspective: *What works? What am I responsible for? What can I learn? What is useful about this? What is possible?*

Control versus Serendipity:[60] The alternative to Control is Serendipity, finding joy in unexpected outcomes. By being observant and aware, you can discover situations and outcomes better than what you originally set out for.

From a Control Perspective: *How can I take control of the situation? What do I have to do now? How can I fix this? What is the plan? What rules and guidelines apply?*

From a Serendipity Perspective: *How might this be to my advantage? In what ways can I embrace this situation? What happens if I wait and see? How do I find joy in this situation? Is this an opportunity unfolding?*

Ownership versus Stewardship:[61] While ownership is possessing and asserting control over material possessions, stewardship takes a more holistic view. It emphasizes your role as caretaker and custodian of the resources you have been entrusted with.

From an Ownership Perspective: *How much stuff do I have, and how much do I need? Do I have these things for myself, or to show others? How much time, energy, and money do I spend on my stuff? Who can take my stuff, and how do I protect it? Are my belongings tied to my self-image?*

From a Stewardship Perspective: *Do I remember that everything is temporary? How can I make the best use of what I have? Am I grateful for what I have? Do I use my resources responsibly and without waste? Am I committed to thoughtful stewardship?*

Independence versus Synergisity:[62] Synergisity does not replace your independence; but enhances it. While being independent means you can stand on your own, synergisity is teaming up to achieve more. You keep your freedom, but working together with a group can make your efforts even more powerful. By combining your skills and strengths with others, you get more done, more efficiently.

---

[58] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_reframing

[59] Marilee Adams, PhD, "Change Your Questions, Change Your Life", 2022, Chap 3

[60] Richard M. Eyre, "Three Deceivers", 2008

[61] Richard M. Eyre, "Three Deceivers", 2008

[62] Richard M. Eyre, "Three Deceivers", 2008

From an Independence Perspective: *How can I assert my autonomy in this situation? In what ways can I make decisions without relying on others? What steps can I take to achieve my goals independently? How do I ensure self-reliance and freedom of action? What can I do to keep my individuality and autonomy?*

From a Synergistic Perspective: *How can we make this a win/win situation? In what ways can I work collectively for a better result? What steps encourage synergy and shared success? How can I ensure cooperation and mutual support? What actions contribute to harmony and collaboration?*

Failure versus Feedback:[63] Instead of seeing setbacks as failures, think of them as feedback. This outlook allows you to adapt, turning what might seem like a failure into a stepping stone for future success.

> *I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.*
>
> --Thomas Edison

From a Failure Perspective: *Will my life ever get any better? What's wrong with me? Why am I such a failure? Why does everything seem to go wrong? Why can't I ever get a break?*

From a Feedback Perspective: *What can I learn from this? How can I improve based on this feedback? Can I use this in some way? What are the lessons learned? Is this as an opportunity for improvement?*

Obstacle versus Challenge:[64] While obstacles can stop you in your tracks, challenges inspire you to greater efforts. When faced with obstacles, it is easy to get discouraged. But challenges present an opportunity to harness your strengths and creativity. Rather than seeing obstacles as roadblocks, see them as challenges that fuel your determination and nurture personal growth.

From an Obstacle Perspective: *Why is this situation difficult? What is standing in my way? How do I overcome this situation? Why does everything seem like a hurdle?*

From a Challenge Perspective: *How can I navigate this opportunity? Does this situation encourage problem-solving? What realistic steps can I take? How will I be better after this? Am I looking at this like a challenge?*

Stress versus Excitement:[65] Although stress and excitement trigger similar physiological responses, stress can take a toll on your health. But excitement is like a burst of positive energy. When faced with the choice, channeling excitement over stress is a healthier alternative.

From a Stress Perspective: *Why is this situation causing me so much stress? What's triggering these anxious feelings? How do I cope with this overwhelming pressure?*

From an Excitement Perspective: *How can I channel this energy into positive anticipation? In what ways does this situation spark enthusiasm? What steps can I take to turn stress into excitement? How does this present an opportunity for positive energy?*

---

[63] Carl Massy, "The Guidebook to Happiness", 2012, Chap 21

[64] https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/challenges-obstacles-vikas-shirodkar

[65] https://www.verywellmind.com/what-kind-of-stress-is-good-for-you-3145055

Journaling[66]

Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or penmanship when you journal. Forget the rules. Use a notebook, phone, or computer. You do not need to write every day, or capture every detail of your life. All that matters is that it helps you. Try different tools, schedules, and styles until something fits. Your journal is yours alone; you are the author and the audience.

Your preferences will likely change over time. You may shift between paper and digital, or use both. Include drawings, photos, sketches, and any other creative inputs that appeal to you. Let your style evolve. What matters is that your thoughts have somewhere to go.

There are many ways to journal. You can reflect on your day, analyze dreams, track emotions, explore personal growth, or combine several approaches. Journaling is not reserved for certain people. It is a flexible, powerful tool for anyone who wants to understand and express their inner life.

Know[3.4-31] Journaling Methods

Springboard:[67] Springboards help you focus your writing by offering a starting point, whether a statement, question, or quote. Statements guide thought, questions prompt exploration, and quotes invite reflection. (Try using the Leaves of Life daily readings for this.)

Daily Mundane Events: Capture your day by journaling ordinary moments such as routines, interactions, or small details, and reflect on the thoughts and feelings they evoke. This transforms the mundane into meaningful insight and creates a record of your life.

Character Sketch:[68] Choose a person you wish to understand, including yourself. Reflect on their behavior, your perceptions, and your emotional responses. This builds insight and clarity in relationships and conflict.

Captured Moments:[69] Choose a meaningful moment and describe it with vivid detail and emotion. Reflect on its significance to better understand what matters most to you.

Dialog:[70] Recall a real or imagined conversation, describe what was said and felt, and reflect on its meaning. This preserves connection and deepens self-understanding.

List of 100:[71] Create a list of 100 items on a theme or goal. It could be anything from personal aspirations to favorite books or places you want to visit. Use it to spark creativity, reflect on your values, and explore why each item matters to you. This structured brainstorming exercise sparks creativity and encourages self-reflection.

---

66 Much of this section from: Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self: Twenty-Two Paths to Personal Growth", 1990

67 Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 7

68 Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 8

69 Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 10

70 Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 11

71 Luciano Passuello, "The Very Best of Litemind", 2009

Mind Mapping:[72] Mind mapping starts with a central idea and branches into related thoughts, emotions, or goals. Use words or images to explore connections. It is a powerful tool for brainstorming, organizing, and gaining insight into your mind. (See Mind Mapping p. 795)

Stream of Consciousness:[73] Let your thoughts flow freely without structure or judgment. Like song lyrics or poetry, write whatever comes to mind. This unfiltered expression encourages self-discovery and captures a raw, honest snapshot of your inner world.

List of Major Life Events:[74] List important life milestones such as achievements, challenges, or turning points. Reflect on the emotions and lessons tied to each. Create a roadmap of your patterns and resilience.

Day of the Month Topic:[75] Assign a theme to each day of the month, like gratitude, work, relationships, or goals. Let that topic guide your journal entry each time it comes around. This adds variety, direction, and helps you track patterns over time.

Unsent Letters:[76] Write unsent letters to people from your past, present, or imagination, even to yourself or a Higher Power. Use this as a private, therapeutic outlet to express emotions, explore truths, and gain clarity about yourself and your relationships.

Perspectives:[77] Explore alternate paths, perspectives, or timelines. Step into others' shoes or imagine different choices to gain insight into your life, relationships, and decisions.

Dreams: Unlock the mysteries of your mind by journaling your dreams. Keep a notebook at your bedside. Immediately on awakening, capture the fragments of your dreams on paper. Each dream is a window into your inner world. I have been dream-journaling for years, and this is what I found:

Recalling dreams takes practice.
You will never capture all of your dreams.
Dreams add fascinating new dimensions to your life.
Many dreams are your mind rehashing trivial events of the day.
Dreams can give you great insight into important events.
Dreams are personal. You can interpret them better than anyone.
You can revisit your dream settings during Inner Focus.
Some books and online sites can be helpful in interpreting dreams.
Over time, dreams can display meaningful recurring themes.

12 Step Work: Use your journal to reflect on each Step of the 12 Steps to a Good Life. Track your progress with the written exercises and use the structure to support self-discovery and personal growth.

---

[72] Florian Rustler, "Mind Mapping for Dummies", 2012
[73] Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 13
[74] Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", Chap 14
[75] Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 16
[76] Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 17
[77] Kathleen Adams, M.A., "Journal to the Self", 1990, Chap 18

Inner Focus: You can journal your experiences as you complete your daily readings, meditation, or quiet time. Or, after some calming breaths or a short prayer, you can use journaling itself as an Inner Focus technique.

Journaling with AI: Journaling with AI is a twist on the classic practice of putting pen to paper. With AI, you can enhance your self-reflection by engaging in a dialogue with a digital companion, or using AI to "clean up", summarize, or assess the sentiment of your writing.

Know[3.4-32] Journaling Cautions[78]

Although journaling presents tremendous benefits, as with any tool, there are drawbacks. I am remiss if I do not bring some of these to your attention.

Privacy: Keep your journal private. Since it contains your best and worst, it can easily be misinterpreted by someone, or even used against you. Your journal must remain a secure space for self-reflection without compromising your privacy. To maintain your privacy:

If someone knows you keep a journal, be clear on your privacy.
You do not have to tell everyone (or anyone) about your journal.
Lock your journal in a safe or lockbox.
If you keep a digital journal, password-protect it.

For a paper journal, you can develop your own script or codes. I did this for years and it was a great intellectual exercise. While not for everyone, and a significant investment in time and effort, it is also a lot of fun.

Overthinking: An excessive journaling habit can trap you in overthinking, disrupting your ability to live in the moment and enjoy life as it unfolds. Balancing reflection with being present allows for a more enriching and mindful experience of life.

Negative Spiral: During challenging times, engaging in journaling might inadvertently lead your thoughts down a path of negativity. While for many, journaling negative thoughts and emotions is helpful, be mindful of journaling during difficult periods.

Getting Lost: Some people can become so involved in journaling that it has detrimental effects on their life. A man named Robert Shields is famous for leaving a diary of over 37 million words.[79] He documented his life in five-minute intervals. If journaling becomes obsessive, put it aside for a bit and get back to your real life.

Passive-Aggressive Journaling: I went through a phase where I used my journal to express anger, but never did anything to resolve the problems or address the issues. Instead of helping in my development or personal growth, it became a stagnant space where grievances lingered unattended. When I finally recognized how unhelpful this practice was, I made changes to make my journal more solution-oriented.

---

[78] https://www.trackinghappiness.com/can-journaling-be-harmful/, these points are all mentioned in the article except the last one, which is from my own experience

[79] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Shields_(diarist)

Affirmations

A staple of the self-help movement, affirmations have filtered into the culture and even comedy,[80] usually in a way that illustrates their shortcomings. Affirmations can be a valuable tool in promoting constructive shifts in mindset and addressing various emotional and psychological challenges. They work best as part of a comprehensive approach, which may include professional support, self-care practices, and healthy lifestyle choices.

Books and online media often present affirmations as the simple repetition of positive statements. Their authors may be well meaning, but affirmations used improperly can have a negative effect[81] and make you feel worse.[82]

I had both good and bad experiences with affirmations. As a young man, believing I could "reprogram" my unconscious through repetition, I was unable to escape my depression and anxiety. I believe I was worse off for the effort. Used correctly, however, affirmations provide a positive experience. Context and phrasing are key. Here is what you need to know about affirmations:[83]

Affirmations only help when they align with what you believe or can prove. If you repeat something you feel is false, your mind will reject it. Telling yourself "Everyone loves you," when your life is falling apart will not work. Affirmations do not fix deep issues like self-esteem or negative thinking unless they are grounded in truth, or at least possibility.

In group settings, affirmations work by creating social influence. Children using affirmations together lost their fear of the dark faster. Team chants or shared affirmations in sports or work settings can uplift morale, but the effectiveness lies more in the group dynamic than the words themselves.

Affirmations help high performers maintain focus if they already have confidence. For example, reminding yourself of your strengths before a big task works if you know you are prepared. Focus on effort: say, "I will do my best," and follow through. This kind of affirmation builds trust in yourself.

Affirmations are most powerful when they reflect your core values. For instance, you might affirm, “The universe is a friendly place,” but only after life experience makes that feel true. Allow affirmations like these to reinforce your evolving beliefs.

To make affirmations useful for change, ground them in action and truth. Instead of saying, "I am always calm," try, "Taking a deep breath helps me feel calm." This statement is believable and testable. It supports growth without triggering resistance.

---

[80] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Smalley

[81] https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/ psyifp/aeechterhoff/wintersemester2011-12/seminarthemenfelderdersozialpsychologie/04_wood_etal_selfstatements_psychscience2009.pdf

[82] https://commons.ln.edu.hk/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.ca/&httpsredir=1&article=3651&context=sw_master

[83] https://steverosephd.com/do-positive-affirmations-work/
https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/do-affirmations-work

Creating your own affirmations.

Know[3.4-33] When creating affirmations:

Make sure they are true, might be true, or could one day be true.
Use affirmations to remind yourself of possibilities and potential.
Use affirmations to remind yourself what you know to be true.
Affirm positive efforts instead of end results.
Memorize, print, or record them so they are always available.
Do not use affirmations that cause resistance or internal conflict.
Affirmations complement implementation intentions.

There are three basic rules for affirmations:[84]

1. Acknowledge and accept reality: Honestly acknowledge your current situation. This creates a realistic foundation for growth.

2. Create specific, achievable actions: Craft affirmations that are clear and achievable. Break down big goals into smaller, manageable actions for practical success.

3. Reaffirm your goal: Consistency is key. Regularly reaffirm your goals to keep them fresh in your mind. This helps maintain a positive mindset.

Use these examples if you would like to experiment with affirmations. Notice how they follow the three rules for affirmations listed above. They are written in first person so you can simply read or repeat them to yourself. If you record and play them back, try changing them to second person, i.e., say "You are…" rather than "I am…" If any of your affirmations make you uncomfortable, stop using them. Seek professional help if necessary.

Stress Management:
I have a lot of stress.
I will practice deep breathing twice a day.
Instead of stress, I choose peace.

Career Growth:
I can do better in my career.
I will take courses in sales and management.
Continued skill acquisition will enhance my career.

Self-Confidence:
I would like to have more self-confidence.
New challenges can enhance my self-esteem.
Small success will improve my self-confidence.

Financial Stability:
My financial struggles make my life difficult.
I will create a budget and save 10% of my monthly income.
I can build financial stability through better choices.

---

[84] https://www.udemy.com/course/recontruct-your-mental-health-as-a-human-being/learn/lecture/38609146#notes

Relationships:
I admit I have relationship problems.
I will practice active listening when I talk to people.
My relationships can improve with open communication.

Procrastination:
I accept that I have a procrastination habit.
I will break tough tasks into smaller steps.
If I take one step at a time, I can achieve my goals.

Health and Wellness:
I want to be healthier.
I can start with an easy workout schedule.
By starting slow, I can improve my health.

Time Management:
I often get overwhelmed by everything I have to do.
I will create a schedule and prioritize important tasks.
Working with a schedule will make me more productive.

Organization:
I feel so disorganized!
I can declutter one room at a time.
Breaking things down makes organizing easier.

Learning a New Skill:
I'd like to know more practical information.
I can dedicate 30 minutes a day for continuous learning.
Gradually I will expand my knowledge and capabilities.

Emotional Regulation:
Sometimes my emotions feel out of control.
I will pause and name my feelings when I feel overwhelmed.
Awareness gives me the power to manage my emotions.

Self-Worth:
I often struggle with feeling good enough.
I will acknowledge small wins each day.
Recognizing my value helps me build a stronger sense of self-worth.

Social Confidence:
I feel awkward in social settings.
I will speak to at least one new person each week.
Confidence grows through consistent social practice.

Affirmations Conclusion

The rule of thumb for affirmations is this: Ask yourself, "Do I believe this affirmation is true, or *could* be true?" If you do not believe it, it will not work and may be detrimental. Affirmations are best used in conjunction with other processes, such as meditation, thought stopping, and reframing. They are but one tool among many. Test their effectiveness over time. If they are not working, do not double-down, but reassess their value. Use affirmations to facilitate change in support of your values.

Know[3.4-34] Intrusive Thoughts

While much of this discussion so far has involved changing or managing your thoughts, I want to add a few paragraphs directly addressing intrusive thoughts. Intrusive thoughts are "thoughts of sexual violence, sexual punishment, 'unnatural' sex acts… blasphemous or obscene images, thoughts of harming elderly people or someone close to you, violence against animals or toward children, and impulsive or abusive outbursts or utterances."[85] If you ever had them, you know how frightening they can be.

Intrusive thoughts were a problem for me much of my life. I believed they indicated deteriorating mental health. Toward the end of my drinking career, they became what I thought of as "horrific thoughts." They were constant, running images in the back of my mind. And by "horrific," I mean exactly that. I will not provide examples. Intrusive thoughts can turn a person's life into a living nightmare from which there is no escape except oblivion.

But here are some facts about intrusive thoughts:[86]

Most people have intrusive thoughts.[87]
Intrusive thoughts are usually fleeting.
Healthy people can also have terrible, intrusive thoughts.[88]
These thoughts have likely always been part of being human.
Sometimes people cannot ignore these thoughts easily.
Trying to suppress these thoughts can make them worse.

Understanding that nearly everyone has intrusive thoughts can be a great relief. However, intrusive thoughts can also be indicators of serious disorders.[89] So, while nearly everyone has intrusive thoughts, they can be more disturbing to those with emotional or mental issues.

Here are some strategies for dealing with intrusive thoughts:

Notice intrusive thoughts without judgment.
Shift focus to positive or engaging activities.
Use your senses to stay present.
Challenge your negative thoughts.
Acknowledge and let go of intrusive thoughts.
Picture a calm place to find peace amidst intrusive thoughts.
Be kind to yourself; intrusive thoughts do not define you.
Designate specific time for worries to avoid dwelling on them.
Practice mindful awareness to distance yourself from your thoughts.
Engage in enjoyable activities to shift your focus.
Share thoughts with trusted individuals for relief.
Break tasks into manageable steps to reduce stress.
Create daily structure for control over your thoughts.
Consider therapy if intrusive thoughts disrupt your daily life.

---

[85] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intrusive_thought#General
[86] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intrusive_thought
[87] Jon Hershfield, et al, "The Intrusive Thoughts Toolkit", 2023, Chap 1
[88] Jon Hershfield, et al, "The Intrusive Thoughts Toolkit", 2023, Chap 5
[89] https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/mental-health/coping-with-unwanted-and-intrusive-thoughts/

Thinking Errors

Like all human beings, you make mistakes, and lots of them. You make mistakes, in part, because of how you think. You have biases that operate below awareness,[90] and the greatest bias you have is not taking your biases seriously. Since thinking errors are often tied to your ego and worldview, they are difficult to identify. Your own mind will hide its errors from you.

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned that I first thought it should include critical thinking skills. "Critical thinking" is a buzzword often used by intelligent and educated people as the correct way to arrive at what is true. It is an umbrella term encompassing many skills.[91] But critical thinking alone is not enough. If your thoughts rest on false assumptions, even flawless logic and a genius IQ will lead you astray. Consider this syllogism:

All birds can fly.
Penguins are birds.
Therefore, penguins can fly.

The logic is valid, but the premise is false, so the conclusion is wrong. Consider how many times you have confidently followed a line of reasoning, only to be hurt, disappointed, or confused. Thinking errors are distortions of data or reasoning. Finding them does not mean you are "wrong", but only that cleaning them up could bring better results.

That is why examining your thoughts is essential. You cannot build a sturdy house on a crooked foundation, and you cannot build a sane life on faulty beliefs and muddled, emotional thinking. Clear thinking must be based on accurate premises followed by clear reasoning. Doing otherwise results in poor decisions and unnecessary suffering.

I will be honest with you. This topic made my head spin and gave me headaches. And that is because these errors are so ingrained in my thinking that they are difficult to isolate and examine. They are like looking at an optical illusion that suddenly pops out at you. Or, you are watching a movie that has a sudden twist at the end -- all the clues were there, but you did not see the obvious. Take these thinking errors seriously; they affect every part of your life. And be patient, it is difficult to "unthink" old habits.

The lists of thinking errors that follow may seem tedious and vague. But just as it would be difficult to explain water to a fish, so it is difficult for thinking people to see thinking errors. We are "swimming" in them. Therefore, I begin the lists with what are, to me, the easiest errors to identify and change. They exist at a personal level in everyday thinking.

From there, the discussion wades into ever deeper waters of psychology, language, socialization, and philosophy. And often, the vaguer and more difficult to understand a thinking error is, the more subtle and damaging are its consequences. Be patient with yourself and this process. You are about to discover the fragile nature of this miraculous gift we call "thinking."

---

[90] Joseph T. Hallinan, "Why We Make Mistakes", 2010, p3
[91] Marten Cohen, "Critical Thinking Skills for Dummies", 2015

Cognitive Distortions[92,93]

Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened. --Winston Churchill

Cognitive distortions are specific, irrational thought patterns that contribute to negative emotions and impact mental health. They are often associated with conditions like anxiety or depression. If you become familiar with these thinking errors, and work hard to identify them in your own thinking, your life will change! "Know Your ABCs," and journaling, previously discussed, are excellent tools to discover, explore, and correct cognitive distortions.

The cognitive distortions listed below include a short explanation, an example, and possible solutions to the thinking error. Working on your cognitive distortions requires patience and self-compassion. It will feel like you are attempting to change a fundamental part of yourself… because you are. The following list is not comprehensive.

Know[3.4-34] Catastrophizing: a cognitive distortion where a person excessively focuses on and expects the worst possible outcome in a situation.

Example: *I missed my doctor's appointment; now I'm going to get sick. I made a mistake at work; I'm probably going to be fired. I haven't heard back from my friend; they don't like me anymore. The car made a strange noise; it's going to cost a fortune to fix.*

Solution: Examine the situation rationally. Ask yourself, "Is this really the worst-case outcome? How likely is it?" Look for evidence. Remind yourself of past situations that seemed terrible but turned out fine. Visualize the worst-case outcome. Then ask yourself, "What is the worst that can happen? If I can handle that, then I can handle anything." Replace exaggerated thoughts with grounded, practical ones that keep you calm and capable.

I am prepared for the worst, but hope for the best.

-- Benjamin Disraeli

Know[3.4-35] All-or-Nothing Thinking: also called black-and-white thinking, is when you see situations in extreme categories with no middle ground. You view yourself as either a complete success or a total failure. Others are either entirely good or entirely bad. Events are either perfect or worthless. This distortion is often tied to perfectionism.

Example: *I did not get a perfect score, so I am a failure. If I cannot do this workout perfectly, there is no point in trying. She disagreed with me, so she must hate me. I ate dessert, so my whole diet is ruined. You are not with me, so you must be against me.*

Solution: Notice when you use absolute terms like "always", "never", or "perfect". Pause and reframe the situation. Most of life happens in shades of grey, not black or white. Progress and success are rarely all-or-nothing. Remind yourself that small setbacks do not erase your efforts. Use "both/and" language to add nuance. You can both make a mistake and still be on the right track. You can both fall short today and do better tomorrow.

---

[92] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_distortion#Main_types

[93] Rob Willson, Rhena Branch, "Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Dummies", p20

Know[3.4-36] Mind Reading: the idea that you know what other people are thinking. It can include your belief that people have negative motives toward you or are laughing at you behind your back.

Examples: *He did not laugh at my joke; he does not think I am funny. She is not making eye contact; she thinks I am lying. They did not sit next to me; they must not enjoy my company. My partner is quiet; they must be angry with me. No one said anything about my new haircut; they must all hate it.*

Solution: Look for alternative explanations for the other person's behavior. Question your own assumptions. Ask whether the information you have is sufficient to justify your conclusion. Remind yourself that you cannot read someone's mind. When in doubt, communicate and ask for clarification.

Know[3.4-37] Fortune-Telling: Making negative predictions about future events or outcomes without evidence, leading to worry and anxiety.

Examples: *I am going to bomb this presentation; I just know it. I will never be able to stick to this diet, I always give up. There is no way they will hire me, I am not the type they are looking for. This relationship is going to end badly, just like all the others. No one will show up to the event, it is going to be a disaster. I feel a bit off today; I am sure I am coming down with the flu.*

Solution: Challenge your predictions by trying new things and taking some risks. Your past experiences do not define your future, so keep life interesting by being open to new opportunities. Look for evidence that contradicts your negative assumptions. Write your prediction down, then review its accuracy afterward. This helps train your mind to expect more balanced outcomes.

Know[3.4-38] Labeling: overgeneralizing and attributing negative labels to people or situations without facts. People with low self-esteem may use negative labels like "worthless" or "inferior" to describe themselves. Labeling others (name calling), or generalizing about the world, simplifies a complex issue with a single word. Once you mentally apply a label, it is very difficult to erase or work around it. Much of negative self-talk involves labeling.

Examples: *I did not finish my project on time; I am such a loser. I cannot believe I made a mistake in my presentation, I am so stupid. He forgot my birthday; he is a terrible husband. She tripped during her dance recital, she is so clumsy.*

Solution: Avoid labeling yourself and others. Look for evidence that does not align with your labels. Focus on specific actions or traits rather than reducing an entire person to a single word.

Know[3.4-39] Emotional Reasoning: believing that your feelings are an accurate reflection of reality. You believe if you feel it, it must be true.

Examples: *I feel overwhelmed, I will never solve all these problems. I am anxious, something terrible is going to happen. I feel guilty, I must have done something terrible. I am upset, so this relationship must be bad for me. I feel lonely, nobody loves me.*

Solution: Remember that feelings are not facts; they may not accurately reflect reality. Assess the situation calmly, seek evidence, and let feelings subside before re-evaluating. Look for evidence to either support or contradict your feelings.

Know[3.4-40] Should, Must, Have to, Ought:

"Shoulda, woulda, coulda... language that keeps you stuck" --TA

"Should, must, have to, and ought" statements make unrealistic demands or expectations on yourself or others, often without considering the circumstances. They are are unreasonable, rigid, and do not allow for errors.

Examples: *I don't have a choice. I have to do that. I should do more… I should be more… I ought to… I need to…*

Solution: Maintain flexible preferences. Instead of words like 'must', 'need', and 'should', use 'prefer', 'desire', and 'want'. Treat approval from others as a preference, rather than a necessity. Understand that everyone does not conform to your demands. Maintain your standards, ideals, and preferences, but let go of rigid demands about how you, others, and the world 'must' be. (See Self-Talk p. 308)

Know[3.4-41] Personalization: when you accept more blame for something than was actually your fault.

Examples: *I must be the reason for their argument; it happened right after I entered the room. She seems upset; I must have said something offensive. He looks frustrated; I must have done something to irritate him. They canceled the party; they must not like me.*

Solution: When you fault yourself without evidence, challenge these automatic thoughts and consider alternative explanations. Seek feedback from trusted individuals to gain a more objective perspective. Be realistic about your influence and control over situations. Practice self-compassion. Acknowledge your imperfections. Remember that people's actions are not always about you. Replace negative self-talk with more balanced statements.

If you blame yourself for other people's choices, remind yourself that they have free will and make choices, too. And then ask yourself, "Who do I think I am that I have that much influence over other people's lives?"[94]

Know[3.4-42] Blaming: placing responsibility or fault on others for your negative experiences, emotions, or problems. It can prevent you from taking personal accountability and lead to a cycle of negative thinking patterns.

Example: *It's all your fault that I'm feeling this way. I can't believe you made me do that. My unhappiness is because of what you said to me. If you hadn't been so careless, this wouldn't have happened. You're to blame for my mistakes. You made me do it.*

Solution: Stop blaming others, by reflecting on your own actions. Accept responsibility for your choices. Communicate with others and avoid generalizations. Focus on solutions. Acknowledge that the situation may be more complex than you realize. Learn from your mistakes.

One of the major issues for all of us is taking responsibility for our own thoughts and actions. Yes, other people may throw up roadblocks or cause you difficulties, but ultimately, you are responsible for your thoughts, your feelings, and your behavior. It is all up to you!

---

[94] This helpful advice from Kelly AA Member

Know[3.4-43] Always Being Right: refusing to consider that you might be wrong, and insisting on being correct, often at the expense of others' perspectives. This is related to protecting your self-esteem and worldview.

Examples: *I am always right, and everyone else is wrong. There is no way I could make a mistake. My opinion is the only one that matters. I do not need to listen to what others have to say because I know I am right. Admitting I am wrong is a sign of weakness, and I cannot let that happen. I have to be right to prove my worth.*

Solution: Practice humility and be open to the possibility of making mistakes. Listen to others, promote collaboration, and value different viewpoints. Seek feedback and learn from your past errors, and accept that you do not need to have all the answers. Prioritize relationships over always being right. Focus on building self-esteem rather than rigidly insisting on being correct.

Know[3.4-44] Overgeneralizing: making broad conclusions based on limited evidence, assuming that negative events represent an ongoing pattern.

Examples: *I failed, so I am a failure. No one ever likes me. The human race is terrible. The world is a dangerous place. I always make the same mistakes. Everyone at work thinks I am incompetent. Every time I try something new, I mess it up. I can never do anything right. People are idiots. Everything is terrible. My life sucks.*

Solution: Instead of using extreme terms like "always" and "never," put things in perspective. Remind yourself that others face similar challenges. Avoid sweeping judgments. Be specific in your statements. One incident does not define you, others, or the world. Focus on making improvements and acknowledge that nothing and no one is perfect.

Know[3.4-45] Disqualifying the Positive: discounting your positive experiences or qualities; maintaining negative beliefs despite the evidence.

Examples: *I got the job, but it was probably just luck. My friends complimented my cooking, but they are just being polite. I received an award, but it does not really mean much. People said I gave a great presentation, but they were being nice.*

Solution: Accept compliments with a simple, "Thank you." Be aware of your tendency to discount positive feedback and actively challenge it. Recognize and acknowledge your strengths and accomplishments. Shift your mindset to embrace and internalize positive experiences as valid and meaningful.

Know[3.4-46] Mental Filtering: dwelling on negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive.

Examples: *I got an 'A' on the math test, but completely messed up the third question. We had a great family gathering, but I got into a disagreement that ruined the whole day. I did everything on my to-do list except vacuuming, and now I feel like a failure. My friend said I looked good in that outfit, but I noticed a stain on my shirt. I would have had a fantastic day at the beach, but I got a sunburn.*

Solution: Deliberately focus on and collect evidence that contradicts your negative thoughts. When you catch yourself filtering out positive or neutral information and dwelling on the negative, consciously seek out and acknowledge the positive aspects of a situation.

Know[3.4-47] Magical Thinking:[95] the belief that unrelated events are causally connected, often through thoughts, desires, or rituals, even when there is no logical or empirical basis for that connection. It includes the idea that simply visualizing success, love, or wealth will cause those things to "manifest." This thinking pattern is often a response to uncertainty, helplessness, or emotional distress. When life feels out of control, magical thinking offers a sense of hope, control, or meaning. But while it may feel comforting, it is often misleading, ending in disappointment or worse.

Popular books like "The Secret"[96] and "Think and Grow Rich"[97] promote versions of this mindset, claiming that the universe responds to your thoughts, and that success is a matter of focus and belief. Some popular forms of prayer, regrettably, are disguised versions of magical thinking.

While intention and focus influence your behavior and motivation, they cannot bypass the laws of cause and effect in the real world. I, personally, do not believe God will break the laws of physics because I ask Him to.

The problem with magical thinking is that it disconnects you from reality. It promotes a false sense of control and discourages you from taking practical action. If you believe that positive thinking will fix your finances, heal your body, or bring someone back into your life, you might ignore the necessary steps, responsibilities, or boundaries that would actually improve your situation. When magical thinking fails, you blame yourself for "not believing hard enough," leading to guilt, shame, and disillusionment.

Examples: *If I want something badly enough, I can make it happen. I can manifest my wishes through positive energy. If I follow my dreams and never give up, they will come true. Like attracts like, if I think I am rich, I will become rich. If I love someone enough, they will love me in return. If I believe it, I can achieve it.*

Solution: think like a scientist. Ground your thinking in observable evidence and logic. Set goals, create plans, and take real-world steps toward change. Be cautious of beliefs that promise something for nothing, or that rely on supernatural causality. Ask yourself: "What evidence supports this belief? What actions can I take that are likely to make a difference?" By replacing magical thinking with practical action, you ground yourself in reality.

> *Bad theology hurts people…*
>
> --Melissa Dougherty[98]

Do not confuse magical thinking with spirituality or faith. Both involve beliefs beyond strict rationality, but they serve different functions. Magical thinking claims direct supernatural control over external events through thoughts, rituals, or divine intervention at your request. Spirituality, in contrast, develops connection and growth. It may include belief in a higher realm but does not claim thinking or prayer alone changes material reality. You can be spiritual and grounded at the same time.

---

[95] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magical_thinking

[96] Rhonda Byrne, "The Secret", 2006

[97] Napolean Hill, "Think and Grow Rich", 1937

[98] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hnGLmbWC4M

Relational Thinking Errors

Relational thinking errors are faulty patterns of thought that arise from emotional dependency, unresolved trauma, or unhealthy relationship dynamics. Although they arise in relationships and have an emotional impact, they distinctly affect your thought processes. They often masquerade as virtues, but they are based on fear, shame, or the desire to control outcomes. Left unexamined, they can distort your understanding of love, responsibility, and personal worth.

These errors frequently emerge in people who were raised in chaotic or emotionally inconsistent environments. They learned to survive by managing the emotions of others, reading nonverbal cues, avoiding conflict, or becoming indispensable.[99] As adults, these same habits become liabilities, leading to resentment, confusion, poor boundaries, and exhaustion.

Know[3.4-48] Codependency is a key relational error. It is the tendency to attach your identity and emotional well-being to another person's mood, behavior, or needs.[100] You may feel responsible for fixing or saving someone else, even at the cost of your own health or integrity.

Know[3.4-49] People-pleasing[101] is another common pattern. You may consistently defer to others, say yes when you want to say no, or change your opinions to match the group. This often comes from a belief that you must earn love and safety by keeping others happy.

Know[3.4-50] Guilt-based Morality means making decisions based on shame, obligation, or fear of disapproval.[102] Instead of asking what is right, you ask what will avoid conflict or prevent someone from being upset. Over time, you may lose touch with your own values.

Know[3.4-51] Conflict Avoidance is the attempt to avoid or minimize conflict with others.[103] You may avoid addressing problems, suppress your needs, or smooth things over at your own expense. Ironically, this often creates more tension, not less, because problems go unspoken.

Know[3.4-52] Solutions to Relational Thinking Errors

Learn to recognize when your thoughts or actions are driven by fear rather than values. Practice setting boundaries. Allow others to have their own emotions and responsibilities. Real love and connection require honesty, not performance. You are not here to keep everyone happy. You are here to live with clarity, truth, and peace. Relational thinking errors are not your fault, but they are your responsibility to heal. Through honesty and practice, you can reclaim your relationships, and yourself. (See Relationships p. 425)

---

[99] John Bradshaw, "Bradshaw On: The Family", 1988
[100] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codependency
[101] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/people-pleasing
[102] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/maybe-its-just-me/201008/what-do-we-owe-our-partners-obligation-in-relationships
[103] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_avoidance

Cognitive Biases[104,105]

Cognitive biases are systematic, often unconscious, and predictable patterns of thought that lead to perceptual or judgmental errors in decision-making and reasoning. There are many well-documented cognitive biases, here is a list of some of them:

Know[3.4-53] Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, and remember information that supports your existing beliefs and values. You unconsciously select information that aligns with your views while ignoring or discounting anything that challenges them. This bias cannot be fully eliminated, only managed. It is automatic, and causes your own reasoning skills to work against you.

Examples: *I only watch news channels that support my political beliefs. When I research a topic, I search for evidence that reinforces my opinion. If a scientific study agrees with my viewpoint, I trust it without question. I seek out discussions with people who already agree with me. If someone disagrees, I immediately look for flaws in their logic.*

Solution: Deliberately seek out opposing evidence. Use multiple sources when researching a topic, especially ones that challenge your current beliefs. Ask yourself if your conclusions are based on evidence or preference. One useful technique is called "The Tenth Man."[106] When everyone, including yourself, seems convinced of an idea, deliberately adopt the opposite stance. Pretend your conclusion is wrong, and investigate it from a contrarian perspective. This will help identify potential blind spots in your thinking.

Know[3.4-54] Egocentric Bias:[107] a cognitive bias where individuals tend to see themselves as more central and influential in events and situations than they really are, often overlooking the perspectives and contributions of others. This bias can lead to misunderstandings and misjudgments. It is seeing yourself as the center of the universe.

Examples: *I aced the group project, so it was clearly my efforts that made it successful. My friend's breakup happened because I wasn't there to offer advice. The party was a hit because I organized it, and without me, it would have been boring. When my favorite team won, it was undoubtedly because I wore my lucky jersey.*

Solution: Acknowledge the contributions of others in shared accomplishments Remember that outcomes often involve multiple factors beyond your influence. Appreciate that social interactions are influenced by various individuals. Recognizing the role of luck and chance in different situations. Understand that group decisions are not solely based on your participation. Develop humility by acknowledging the skills and efforts of others. You are not the center of the universe.

---

[104] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases

[105] https://yourbias.is

[106] https://www.mobilespoon.net/2023/02/challenge-your-decision-making-process-with-the-tenth-man-rule.html

[107] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egocentric_bias

Know[3.4-55] Anchoring Bias:[108] when you rely heavily on the first piece of information you encounter when making decisions. This initial information can strongly influence your subsequent judgments and choices. It often leads to insufficient adjustments away from the initial anchor, resulting in bad decisions. This bias is seen in various situations, from pricing and negotiations to everyday choices. It highlights the importance of being aware of how information impacts decision-making.

Examples: *The initial high asking price for a used car can anchor your perception of its value. The first offer in negotiations sets the tone for further discussions. The original listed price of an item online influences your perception of whether it's a good deal. The first impression in a job interview can impact the overall evaluation. In legal cases, the initial damages amount suggested shapes the final settlement.*

Solution: Be aware of the potential influence of the anchoring bias. Question the initial information you encounter. Compare information or prices from other sources. Establish your own anchor based on research. Avoid rushing decisions. Set your own limits for what you will do or pay. Get feedback from others to gain perspective and challenge existing anchors. Be cautious when you see ads discounted prices, "half off", or "reduced 20%".

Know[3.4-56] Hindsight Bias:[109] the tendency to believe that events were predictable after they have already occurred. It is the feeling that you "knew it all along," even when you had no way of knowing the outcome beforehand. This bias causes you to overestimate your ability to predict events and alters how you remember past situations. It can distort your learning process and decision-making by making the outcome seem more obvious than it actually was. Recognizing this bias helps you avoid false confidence in your predictive ability and allows for more honest reflection.

Examples: *After the stock market crash, I was sure it would happen; it was so obvious. When the team lost the game, I knew they would lose from the start. When a business failed, I saw it coming long before anyone else did. After a surprising election result, I said I saw it as inevitable. When my company's product flopped, I knew it was doomed.*

Solution: Track your predictions before outcomes. Recognize the uncertainties you face. Seek diverse perspectives. Engage in discussions with those holding different views. Remain humble about the unpredictability of the future. Focus on learning from events rather than protecting your ego.

I believe Hindsight Bias is often in effect when people describe both their past successes and failures. We see the past in a way that supports our current worldview. It can distort your perception of the past because your current knowledge and emotions reshape how you remember what happened. You might romanticize past successes, or you might exaggerate failures, forgetting the uncertainty or effort involved. This revisionist memory creates false clarity and can lead to poor decisions, unrealistic comparisons, or regret. To counter this, remind yourself that your memory is influenced by your present perspective, not just past facts.

---

[108] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anchoring_effect

[109] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindsight_bias

Know[3.4-57] Normalcy Bias:[110] causes individuals to underestimate or ignore the possibility of a disaster or crisis, assuming that things will continue to be normal or as expected. Normalcy bias can lead to a false sense of security and lack of emergency preparation.

Examples: *I dismiss storm warnings, because they never do any real damage. I ignore fire alarms, because they are always either false alarms or a drill. I don't evacuate during floods, believing they won't reach me. I downplay health risks, thinking "I'll be fine". I don't need to have extra food and water, because I can just go to the store and get more.*

Solution: Educate yourself about potential risks and disasters. Prepare an emergency plan and kit for various scenarios. Familiarize yourself with warning signs and signals. Listen to experts and authorities when they issue alerts. Participate in drills and simulations to practice your response to emergencies. Encourage a proactive mindset that acknowledges the possibility of disruptions to your routine.

Know[3.4-58] Dunning-Kruger Effect:[111] situations in which individuals with low ability in a particular domain tend to overestimate their ability. At the same time, those with high competence may underestimate their own abilities because they assume that tasks which they find easy must also be easy for others. This bias can lead to significant errors in judgment and a lack of self-awareness regarding one's own skill level.

Examples: *I've had a few accidents, but I'm an excellent driver. I'm a fantastic chef, but not everyone likes my cooking. I consider myself a great singer, because people at the bar love me at karaoke. I took an online course, I'm good at that.*

Solution: Actively seek feedback and constructive criticism from knowledgeable individuals. Stay open to learning and improvement. Compare your skills and knowledge to objective standards or benchmarks in the field. Be willing to admit when you do not know something. Remain teachable. You do not have to know everything.

Know[3.4-59] Availability Heuristic:[112] a mental shortcut in decision-making where people rely on readily available information from memory to assess the likelihood of events or their importance. This bias can lead to overestimating the significance of easily recalled information, even if it does not accurately represent actual probabilities or importance.

Examples: *I saw recent news reports of plane crashes, I think air travel is too risky. After watching a documentary on shark attacks, I am afraid of swimming in the ocean. In making investment decisions, I may be influenced by get rich quick stories. When I read about illnesses on the internet, I think I have those diseases.*

Solution: Seek out and consider a broad range of information and data when making decisions. Do not rely solely on what easily comes to mind. Avoid making decisions based solely on recent or highly publicized events. Use decision-making tools, checklists, and expert opinions to make more informed judgments.

---

[110] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normalcy_bias

[111] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect

[112] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Availability_heuristic

Know[3.4-60] Cognitive Dissonance:[113] the discomfort felt when conflicting beliefs or values create inner tension, leading people to resolve the inconsistency through belief changes, rationalization, or other means.

Examples: *I feel uncomfortable when… I know smoking is harmful but I still smoke. I want to save the planet, but I drive an SUV and use a lot of plastic. I value honesty, but tell a little white lie now and then. I advocate for a healthy diet but don't eat right, myself. I support a political candidate but ignore evidence of their corruption.*

Solution: Evaluate your behaviors, assessing if they align with your values. Embrace a growth mindset and be open to changing your attitudes and behaviors. Seek out information and perspectives that challenge your existing beliefs. Acknowledge that change is a natural part of personal development. Avoid harsh self-judgment. Use cognitive dissonance as a sign to improve yourself, not rationalize your actions.

You can use cognitive dissonance to your advantage. If a person irritates you, or you carry a resentment, pray for that person. Wish them well. Be as sincere as possible. Since the resulting cognitive dissonance is uncomfortable, your mind will gradually change your anger and resentment to align with your prayers and intentions. Over time, your thoughts shift to resolve this tension, allowing compassion, understanding, or even forgiveness to take root.

I don't like that man, I must get to know him better.

--Abraham Lincoln[114]

Know[3.4-61] Fundamental Attribution Error:[115] attributing the behavior of others to internal, dispositional factors (such as personality or character), while overlooking the influence of external, situational factors. This bias leads to an overemphasis on personal traits when explaining the actions of others, neglecting the context in which they occur.

Examples: *When I see a classmate arriving late for a lecture, I assume they are lazy or irresponsible. When a colleague makes a mistake at work, I think they lack competence. If I witness someone being rude to a cashier, I conclude they have a bad personality.*

Solution: Consider the situational context when assessing others' behavior. Remind yourself that people's actions are often influenced by external factors beyond their control. Empathize with their circumstances, understanding that anyone can have a bad day or face challenges. Practice a more nuanced and balanced perspective. Do not be so quick in making judgments, and be more open to understanding the complexities of another's situation.

Ask yourself, "What else could explain this?" or "Have I ever acted like that when I was under pressure or upset?" Over time, this habit reminds you that most people are doing their best under circumstances you may never fully see. Because you lack context for their behavior, your brain fills in the blanks by assuming character flaws. This double standard, where you give yourself situational grace but deny it to others, is a hallmark of this thinking error.

---

[113] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance

[114] Quote from Cheri S., AA Member

[115] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamental_attribution_error

Logical Fallacies[116,117]

Logical fallacies are flaws in reasoning that can make an argument invalid or misleading, typically due to errors in logic or structure. These errors are often found in debates or attempts to persuade, such as advertising or expressions of political opinion. If you listen to news broadcasts or political rhetoric, you can spot many of these errors.

Know[3.4-62] Ad Hominem:[118] when an argument attacks the character or personal traits of an individual instead of addressing their argument.

Example: *You're too young to understand politics, so your opinion doesn't count. You're not on the management team, so your ideas don't matter. He is [some pejorative], [part of some group] / [a person who hates some group], so I'm not listening to what he says.*

Solution: Watch for instances of personal attacks rather than addressing the issues. If politicians or news outlets resort to name-calling, questioning motives, or focusing on personal matters instead of policies, it's likely an ad hominem tactic. Stay alert for attempts to sidetrack discussions by diving into unrelated personal details.

Know[3.4-63] Strawman:[119] misrepresenting an opponent's position to make it easier to attack. The term "straw man" comes from the idea of creating a fictitious opponent, easier to defeat than the actual argument.

Example: *If I say kids should have less homework, some say I want to get rid of school entirely. When I recommend less sugar, people claim I want to ban all sweets. When I say we should cut down screen time, they said I want to get rid of phones and computers. When I mention taking short breaks, critics say I am promoting laziness.*

Solution: When faced with a straw man argument, filter out the false argument and focus on the issue. Emphasize detail, identify misconceptions, and address misrepresentations. Redirect your attention to the actual issue to you can dispel the straw man argument for more accurate analysis.

Know[3.4-64] Correlation Does Not Imply Causation:[120] when two events happen together, it does not mean that one caused the other. Consider other factors that might influence the relationship between events.

Example: *I don't know if spending a lot of time on social media makes me depressed, or if I'm already depressed and so spend time on social media. When I eat fast food I gain weight, but I don't't exercise much either. Overworking often coincides with burnout, but difficult relationships may contribute to both overworking and burnout.*

Solution: If event A happens, and then event B happens, it does not mean that A caused B. Be cautious of coincidences and avoid assuming a cause-and-effect relationship based solely on correlation. Investigate additional evidence and identify cause-and-effect relationships. Replicate the series of events, if possible, to isolate the causes involved.

---

[116] https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/common-logical-fallacies
[117] https://upresearch.lonestar.edu/rhetoric/fallacies
[118] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_hominem
[119] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straw_man
[120] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correlation_does_not_imply_causation

Know[3.4-65] False Dilemma:[121] where a situation is presented as having only two possible outcomes or options, when, in reality, there are more. Also known as the "black-and-white fallacy," this oversimplification can limit possibilities, obscure nuance, and manipulate decision-making.

Example: *Believing you must choose between financial success or personal happiness. Thinking a relationship must either continue as-is or end completely. Assuming economic growth and environmental protection cannot coexist.*

Solution: Challenge either-or thinking by looking for additional options. Explore compromise, seek nuance, and question assumptions that limit your perspective. Real life rarely fits into black-and-white choices.

Know[3.4-66] Loaded Question:[122] a question that contains a controversial or biased assumption, making it difficult for the respondent to answer without accepting the premise.

Examples: *Do you still beat your dog? When did you stop stealing from the office? Why do you endorse harmful ideologies? When will you confess to your wrongdoings? How does it feel to consistently lag behind? Have you finally admitted your incompetence? When did you abandon all moral principles? Why do you persist in spreading misinformation? Do you regret your poor choices in life? When will you acknowledge the damage you've caused?*

Solution: Stay calm and address the assumption directly. Reframe the question or clarify your position instead of answering defensively. Take control of the conversation and avoid being trapped by the question's bias.

Know[3.4-67] Illusory Truth Effect:[123] a cognitive bias wherein people are more likely to believe false information as true when they encounter it repeatedly. This phenomenon highlights the influence of familiarity on perceived truth, illustrating that repeated exposure can lead individuals to accept misinformation as accurate.

If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it, and you will even come to believe it yourself.

--[Attributed to] Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda

Example: *I hear a false claim repeated on the news, and suddenly, it starts feeling true. My friend insists on an inaccurate fact, and with each repetition, it gains unwarranted credibility. Advertisements bombard me with misleading information, and over time, I find myself unknowingly accepting it as valid. Social media echoes a falsehood, and the illusion of truth creeps in, clouding my judgment.*

Solution: Seek diverse sources of information to counteract repetition-induced bias. Critically evaluate a claim before accepting it as truth. Engage in fact-checking and verify information through reliable sources. Train your mind to question assumptions and be vigilant against the subtle influence of repetition on belief formation. Pay attention to a news story that is suddenly repeated over and over during a news cycle.

---

[121] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_dilemma
[122] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loaded_question
[123] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illusory_truth_effect

Know[3.4-68] Appeal to Authority:[124] where the credibility of a claim is based on the authority or expertise of the person asserting it, rather than the strength of the argument itself. This fallacious reasoning suggests that because a person of authority or expertise asserts a claim, it must be true.

Example: *I believe the new diet plan is effective because a famous celebrity endorses it. The professor says climate change is a hoax, so it must be true. The CDC asserts that a certain drug is safe, leading me to accept it without question. My boss claims a project is bound to fail, and I take it as fact. The politician declares a policy is the best solution, convincing me of its efficacy.*

Solution: Focus on the strength of the argument rather than the status of the person making it. Remind yourself that expertise does not guarantee infallibility, and authorities can be wrong or biased. Reject the notion that credentials alone validate an argument. Value substance over authority, understanding that valid arguments stand on their own merits rather than relying on the reputation of the speaker.

Know[3.4-69] Red Herring:[125] a logical fallacy characterized by a diversionary tactic that appears plausible but is ultimately irrelevant to the discussion. This misleading technique can be intentional or unintentional, and it does not necessarily involve a conscious effort to mislead. The term is primarily used to indicate that an argument is irrelevant to the central issue.

Examples: *Bringing up issues like deforestation when the discussion is on decreasing the use of plastics. Talking about unhealthy workplace stress when a dietician suggests eating more fruits and vegetables. Suggesting a label design when the staff meeting concerns finding more efficient ways to manufacture widgets.*

Solution: Maintain focus on the issue at hand. Politely suggest tabling those issues not pertinent to the discussion. Be alert to someone redirecting the conversation by introducing frivolous or unrelated details. Remind yourself often of the main issue so you do not get distracted.

Know[3.4-70] Reification:[126] the cognitive process of treating an abstract concept or idea as if it were a concrete or physical entity. This can lead to thinking of abstract concepts as if they were tangible objects, which may not accurately represent their nature.

Examples: *Time marches on. Justice will prevail. Culture dictates our behavior. The economy decides the fate of nations. Happiness slipped through my fingers. Love conquers all. Nature finds a way. Destiny calls. Save the planet. Wisdom comes with age. Technology shapes the future. Freedom demands eternal vigilance. The market determines winners and losers. Truth will always surface in the end. The science is settled.*

Solution: Remind yourself that abstract concepts are conceptual tools or descriptors, not independent entities with inherent agency. When discussing abstract ideas, remain vigilant in treating them as analytical frameworks rather than concrete, autonomous forces. Avoid assigning consciousness or deliberate action to abstract concepts.

---

[124] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_from_authority

[125] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_herring#Logical_fallacy

[126] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reification_(fallacy)

Philosophical Thinking Errors

The following errors come from two distinct but closely related sources that address similar issues of thought and perception. They lie at the bottom of the most basic concepts you use to build your world. They affect your thinking every day, whether you acknowledge them or not. While originating from different disciplines, both sets reveal how flawed assumptions and misuse of language can lead to faulty conclusions.

The first group, drawn from Alfred Korzybski's work in general semantics, examines how language shapes human understanding and behavior.[127] It highlights how we confuse symbols with reality, leading to distorted thinking.

The second group is adapted from Mortimer J. Adler's "Ten Philosophical Mistakes."[128] His work identifies common errors in philosophical reasoning that affect how we interpret knowledge, ethics, and existence.

Know[3.4-71] Confusing the map with the territory:[129] when you treat your mental representations, words, or symbols as if they are identical to the objective reality they represent, you are treating the "map" as the "territory". This error in thinking confuses the mental representation (map) with the actual reality (territory), leading to oversimplified and inaccurate conclusions.

Examples: *A lawyer is logical in all areas of life. Trusting a well-known brand guarantees flawless items. Assuming all citizens of a country share the same values. Mistaking a psychological diagnosis as the whole person. Believing someone is competent, or not, based on their appearance. Judging a book by its cover.*

Solution: Remind yourself that words are not reality. Question assumptions and seek precision in language. Actively listen to others, avoid stereotypes, and treat each person as an individual. Stay open to new information, be willing to adjust your mental models, and communicate accurately to minimize the risk of misinterpretation.

Know[3.4-72] Abstraction Errors:[130] abstraction leaves out details. The higher the level of abstraction, the more details are lost. You know what a tree is, but the word "tree" is a representative symbol for all trees. Errors occur when the generalization is confused with the actual thing, or the thing is assumed to have the same qualities as the entire category.

Examples: *He is lazy; there's no point in giving him any responsibility. This theory doesn't explain everything so it can't be right. I want to be happy like everyone else. He said he was fine yesterday, so there's no reason to think anything has changed. Scientists are geniuses, they don't make mistakes.*

Solution: Use, and insist on, precise language. Question sweeping generalizations, labels, categories or oversimplifications. Ask for clarification when necessary. Understand and explain context to avoid misinterpretations.

---

[127] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_semantics

[128] Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985

[129] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Map%E2%80%93territory_relation

[130] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_semantics#Abstracting_and_consciousness_of_abstracting

Know[3.4-73] Time-binding Errors:[131] failing to recognize that entities change over time, especially people, including yourself. You are not the same person you were a year ago. Refusing to recognize that a situation or person may change over time is an error in thinking.

A good example of this concept is "The Ship of Theseus".[132] A philosophical thought experiment, it questions whether an object remains the same if all its original components are replaced. Legend has it that Theseus rescued Athenian children, sailed on a ship to Delos, and annually, Athenians took the ship on a pilgrimage to honor Apollo. Ancient philosophers debated whether, after centuries of replacing each part, the ship was still the same ship. In modern philosophy, this experiment is used to study identity over time, focusing on the persistence of one's personal identity.

Examples: *I label a friend as unreliable because of past instances, overlooking the possibility of their present reliability. Assessing a coworker's competence based on previous mistakes, I neglect their potential for improvement and growth. Misjudging a partner's actions due to historical missteps, I fail to acknowledge the fluid nature of personal development.*

Solution: the General Semantics concept of "dating" is a mental tool to help you remember that people and situations change over time.[133] For example, I made a lot of mistakes in my life, especially in the late 1990s. But that was Thomas(1998). Now, I am Thomas(2023), writing a book that I hope will help people. This practice emphasizes that individuals transform over time, facilitating forgiveness and releasing resentments. Use this approach to view yourself and others dynamically, developing a mindset that acknowledges the inherent capacity for change in yourself and those around you.

Know[3.4-74] Knowledge of Mental Content:[134] In your everyday experiences, it's easy to assume a clear understanding of your own mind. But the reality is more complex. The inner workings of your mind often operate beneath the surface, beyond your immediate awareness. Despite being the source of your thoughts, your mind's mechanisms remain mysterious, influencing your perceptions and ideas without your direct knowledge.

Examples: *You perform or refrain from some action without understanding why. In conversations, you say something you did not intend to say. Occasionally, you find yourself reacting emotionally to a situation, the origins of those feelings remaining elusive. Memories resurface unexpectedly, catching you off guard, as if retrieved from a hidden archive.*

Solution: Practice mindfulness meditation. Journal to explore and understand your emotions and thoughts. Practice active listening during conversations to better understand your responses and others. Acknowledge and label your emotions to better understand them. Take regular breaks for moments of reflection, checking in with your mental state and thoughts. Prioritize sleep, nutrition, and exercise, to enhance mental clarity. See a mental health specialist if necessary.

---

[131] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_semantics#Extensional_devices

[132] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus

[133] https://epantazis.tripod.com/extensional_devices.htm

[134] Based on: Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Chap 1

Know[3.4-75] Types of Knowledge:[135] You have two ways of understanding the world. The first is factual knowledge. Knowledge is built upon evidence, reasoned analysis, and established facts. The other way is through opinion, both your own and others'. Opinions, being subjective and varying, may not always align with the objective truths found in knowledge. Both knowledge and opinion are important for understanding the world. Recall the previous discussion on types of truth. (See The Truth About Truth p. 292)

There is a flip-side to this idea, and it is just as important. When you disregard your (or another's) opinion because it is not based on objective reality (or, "not based on science"), you are eliminating entire categories of knowledge. For example, philosophy is a kind of knowledge, as are spiritual concepts, mythology, dreams, and other personal and psychological revelations.

Examples: *Fiction is irrelevant. That's what she told me. Religion and myth are just old stories. The guy on the news said it. Dogs are better pets than cats. Hard work is the key to success. Your faith doesn't help you in real life. Because… science!*

Solution: Verify facts through reliable sources, recognize your biases, and stay open to other viewpoints. Identify opinion cues like "I think," and "I believe," and seek supporting evidence. Be willing to revise your views, engage in respectful dialogue, and stay informed from diverse sources. Practice humility by accepting that your opinions may evolve over time.

Know[3.4-76] Moral Relativism:[136] the idea that what is considered right or wrong can vary between people and cultures. In other words, there is no absolute standard of morality that applies universally. Instead, what is deemed morally acceptable may depend on individual beliefs, cultural traditions, or societal norms, making moral judgments subjective and influenced by different perspectives. This is a false argument.

The truth is that filling human needs is good for all persons. Withholding that which fills human needs is detrimental to all persons. This forms a basic rule for understanding what is right and wrong. By using this rule along with what you know about human nature, you can make sensible decisions about how to treat yourself and others. In other words, do that which is good. Do not do that which is not good.

Examples: *You believe lying is wrong, but your friend thinks it's okay in certain situations. You feel that helping others is a moral duty, yet your neighbor may prioritize individual success. Cheating on a test might be absolutely wrong to you, while a classmate may think it's acceptable under certain pressures. Your family considers certain foods taboo due to religious beliefs, but your friend's family doesn't follow those restrictions.*

Solution: Acknowledge that morality is rarely clear cut, right or wrong actions. Clarify your own moral decisions by considering the consequences of your actions on yourself and others. Reflect on the values that are important to you. Appreciate the experiences and beliefs that shape differing moral stances. Be tolerant, but do not compromise your own values.

---

[135] Based on: Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Chap 4

[136] Based on: Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Chap 5

Know[3.4-77] Happiness is the result of some fortuitous event:[137] True happiness is better understood as a sense of satisfaction and contentment occurring over time. It involves striving for a fulfilling and meaningful life, where your overall well-being and sense of purpose are most important.

Examples: *You believe acing a test will make you happy, but the satisfaction fades quickly. Buying a new a car is exciting, yet its novelty diminishes over time. Thinking about a weekend getaway builds happiness, but it wanes once the trip concludes. A promotion at work is promising, but the joy is temporary. Sugary or salty snacks taste good, but only make you want more.*

Solution: There are three important points to remember about happiness:

You are really bad about predicting what will make you happy.[138]
Happiness based on external events is shallow and short-lived.
True happiness is the result of the accumulation of days lived well.

This entire book is ultimately a guideline on how to develop personal happiness. When you realize that happiness is not the result of immediate gratification, but living well and making the world better, you are half-way to finding real happiness. The other half is making the effort to do so. Here are a few reminders on what goes into making a happy life:

Be grateful. Take a moment each day to acknowledge what is good in your life. Look around yourself and say, "I am grateful *for this.*"

Set realistic expectations. Avoid perfectionism and accept that setbacks are a natural part of growth. Make sure your goals are achievable.

Focus on the journey rather than the result. Do not fixate on the outcome. Pay attention to the process, and let the effort itself be meaningful.

Develop resilience. View challenges as opportunities to strengthen yourself.

Be mindful; pray and meditate. Spend time in stillness or spiritual connection every day. Find that silent space inside you.

Maintain a support network. Stay connected to people, groups, medical care, and mental health professionals who provide care and support, listen without judgment, and encourage you to grow.

Find and engage in multiple sources of joy and achievement. Explore different hobbies, service, creativity, and personal goals.

Practice self-care. Take care of your body, mind, and spirit. Rest, move, eat well, and treat yourself kindly.

Accept impermanence. Everything changes, good or bad. When you accept the temporary nature of life's moments, you suffer less and appreciate more.

Be authentic and true to your values.

Make the world better. Give more than you take.

---

[137] Based on: Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Chap 6

[138] https://www.hope-wellness.com/blog/how-well-can-you-predict-what-will-make-you-happy

Know[3.4-78] Free Will:[139] Some people think that every choice you make is influenced by external factors. Others say that despite these influences you still have the ability to make free choices. Free will is much more complicated than most people recognize. Although humans possess free will, choices are often constrained by internal or external factors.

Examples: *Your preference for certain foods may be influenced by your family's eating habits. Your inclination toward introversion or extroversion may have roots in your genetic makeup. Exercising can be influenced by your family's attitude toward fitness. Your relationships may be influenced by past relationships and family dynamics.*

Solution: Challenge your assumptions, biases, and beliefs. Take responsibility for your choices. Learn from your mistakes. Be open to new ideas and experiences. Be comfortable in making your own decisions.

Know[3.4-79] Reductionism:[140] understanding complex things by breaking them down into simpler parts. This method aims to simplify the study of intricate phenomena by focusing on their fundamental building blocks.

Examples: *Simplifying a friend's emotions may overlook the full picture. Focusing on a single cause in a social issue ignores other factors. Relying only on individual nutrients for health ignores the importance of a balanced diet. Reducing a conflict to a single incident overlooks underlying issues. Fixating on one sentence in a book neglects the broader context. Concentrating on a single solution when problem-solving disregards alternatives.*

Solution: See the big picture. Consider all factors when understanding emotions, social issues, or conflicts. Take a balanced approach to health. Consider a person's overall behavior, not just one isolated action. Avoid reducing an issue to isolated details. In decision-making, resist oversimplification and reductionism.

Know[3.4-80] Descartes's Error:[141] René Descartes'[142] (1596-1650) famous Latin phrase, "cogito, ergo sum," ("I think, therefore I am,") laid the foundation of modern Western philosophy.[143] It was the idea that the mind and body are separate. But you are not a body, mind, spirit, and emotions stacked up like boxes. You are one person, not a collection of parts.

Examples: *Feeling down emotionally affects your physical energy and motivation. Ignoring mental health impacts your ability to cope with physical illnesses. Stressful thoughts contribute to digestive issues and stomach discomfort. Anxiety manifests physically through muscle tension and body aches. Overthinking can disrupt your sleep and impact your physical well-being. Emotional distress affects your appetite.*

Solution: Connect mental and physical well-being with mindfulness. Balance emotions through activities like exercise and good nutrition. Manage stress through techniques like deep breathing. Recognize the link between thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Seek professional help when needed. Develop a balanced lifestyle.

---

[139] Based on: Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", 1985, Chap 7

[140] Based on: Mortimer J. Adler, "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", Chap 10

[141] Ideas from: António Damásio, "Descartes' Error", 1994

[142] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Descartes

[143] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito,_ergo_sum

Know[3.4-81] Theological Errors

Theological errors are mistakes, misconceptions, or incorrect beliefs related to religious or theological matters, including doctrines, dogma, and interpretations of sacred texts or spiritual principles.

I chose to address this area because I recall my own spiritual and religious confusion, and I am sure others are similarly searching for a path to follow. I admit that in approaching this section, I had my theological knives sharpened, with copious notes prepared to deconstruct what I see as obvious errors in conventional faiths. But that approach would serve no one, and I struggled with the best way to present these ideas. Religious beliefs are a minefield of worldviews, interpretation, perspectives, and historical debate.

So, I would like to put it like this: some faiths, sects, organized religions, and belief systems cause harm and damage people. This is not inherently a problem with religion; it may be how it is taught, how it is perceived, sick people taking advantage of others' trust, or a result of institutionalized abuse, rigidity, and dogmatism. Regardless, when there is damage, it is up to the individual to find healing. There is confusion about what to believe, fear of punishment, guilt, self-condemnation, and a host of other problems.

What worked for me is when I decided to find "the bottom line" in my beliefs. I started with that. Anything that seemed like man-made rules, dogma, fear-mongering, or control, I put aside to think about later. I worked on fundamentals, and my anxiety and confusion gradually faded away.

The calm and sane mind sees spiritual things as the true realities and material things as only temporary and fleeting. That sort of mind you can never obtain by reasoning, because your reasoning powers are limited by space and time. That kind of a mind you can never obtain by reading, because other minds are also limited in the same way. You can only have that mind by an act of faith, by making the venture of belief.

--Hazeldon Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", 21 June

Solution: I solved my theological confusion through an eclectic mix of reading, listening to how others found their way, and what I now call "Inner Focus", which is prayer and meditation. In your spiritual search, never forget that it is meaning and purpose that matters. Ask yourself, "Do my beliefs make my life better, and do they help me make the world better?"

I use the 12 Steps as an outline and infrastructure to keep me on a meaningful spiritual path. By working the Steps, I gradually found that, for myself, I could answer the questions that mattered, and not worry so much about the ones that did not. If you work the Steps as diligently and thoroughly as possible, many of your theological doubts and misgivings simply fade away. The Steps have worked for me, for many people I know personally, and for millions of people all over the world, for decades.

There are also seven books of wisdom in this volume that have a spiritual or philosophical component. From these, below, I extracted quotes or summarized what I consider to reflect their core teachings. Feel free to find your own. But if you are confused, conflicted, or anxious in your beliefs, find your bottom line. Find what is good, and concentrate on that.

Zen Thoughts: There are realizations outside logic, and a more direct and intuitive knowledge of reality. Zen thoughts are like mirrors that reflect the limits of your logical mind, and of verbal and symbolic thinking.

Before awakening, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I awakened, I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. Now awake, I see that mountains are mountains, and waters are waters.

--Zen Proverb, ZenT[014]

The Enchiridion: True peace comes from recognizing what is within your control, and accepting what is not. Focus on your own thoughts and actions. Concentrate on inner freedom and contentment.

Of things some are in our power, and others are not. In our power are opinion, movement towards a thing, desire, aversion, turning from a thing; and in a word, whatever are our acts. Not in our power are the body, property, reputation, offices, and in a word, whatever are not our own acts.

--The Enchiridion, Verse 1

The Gospel of Matthew: there are two simple commands.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

--Matthew 22:37-39

The Dhammapada: the path to wisdom lies in the mastery of your own mind, guiding you toward a life of compassion and tranquility.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts.

--The Dhammapada, Verse 1

The best of ways is the eightfold; the best of truths the four words…

--The Dhammapada, Verse 273

The Tao Te Ching: Follow the natural way. Acknowledge the balance of opposites. Be simple, humble, and compassionate. Avoid unnecessary conflict and desire. Align your actions with the Way.

The tao that can be described is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be spoken is not the eternal Name. The nameless is the boundary of Heaven and Earth.

--The Tao Te Ching, TaoT[001]

The Book of Proverbs: Pursue wisdom with diligence. Be virtuous. Avoid folly and wickedness. Be discerning in your choices and words. Revere the divine. Strive for a life of integrity, humility, and morality.

Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

--Proverbs 3:5-6

Societal Errors

Know[3.4-82] *Six mistakes mankind keeps making century after century: Believing that personal gain is made by crushing others; Worrying about things that cannot be changed or corrected; Insisting that a thing is impossible because we cannot accomplish it; Refusing to set aside trivial preferences; Neglecting development and refinement of the mind; Attempting to compel others to believe and live as we do.* --Cicero

Societal errors are deeply ingrained misconceptions within cultural norms that influence behavior and thinking based on flawed assumptions. They are so deeply embedded within us that even researching them was tough. I believe they take root at the preconscious level, and are therefore difficult to verbalize and even think about. Analyzing societal errors in yourself is akin to performing brain surgery in a mirror. And since many of these fallacies are the bedrock upon which your worldview is built, discovering them is like suddenly noticing the floor beneath your feet is no longer there.

I have, therefore, listed a few of what I consider the easiest fallacies to identify. There are many others that are more of a third rail,[144] and I avoid these. They automatically and immediately engender political or social animosity. Most societal errors are guarded by their adherents as vigilantly as the Golden Fleece was protected by the dragon that never slept.[145] I hope that by studying the ones I mention, you might extrapolate others that are also causing you pain and unhappiness.

I feel comfortable discussing these example errors because I lived them. There are many more. But these are the societal errors I grew up with in late 20th century Western (United States) society. Your age and culture will determine which societal errors to look out for.

Know[3.4-83] Romantic Love:[146] People often have unrealistic expectations associated with the idea of romantic love. The "Magical Other" is the mythic partner who provides complete fulfillment and meaning. This belief occurs, in part, due to the absence of other sources of connection. It may be linked to a lack of parental love, leading to a desire for someone who can fill that void. (See The Magical Other p. 444)

Know[3.4-84] Success: is commonly defined as the achievement of a goal; the secondary meaning is often tied to notions of fame, wealth, and social status.[147] People often think success means possessing wealth and material comforts. But this conventional idea of success is fundamentally false.[148]

Don't aim at success — the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. --Viktor Frankl

---

[144] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_rail_(politics)

[145] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Fleece

[146] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JH7GS5gGSx0

[147] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/success; https://www.dictionary.com/browse/success; https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/success

[148] https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/7-big-myths-about-success-you-need-to-ignore/293546

Know[3.4-85] Happiness: expectations of happiness frequently establish unrealistic criteria by prioritizing external indicators such as conventional success and approval.[149] The notion that a specific set of achievements or societal validations can make you happy oversimplifies the complex and individual nature of well-being.[150] Many individuals pursue goals that are in conflict with their values, leading to emptiness and unfulfillment. (See Happiness p. 335; Happiness p. 376)

Know[3.4-86] Beauty: Standards of beauty establish unrealistic ideals by emphasizing external traits such as physical appearance and narrow definitions of attractiveness.[151] The prevailing narrative links beauty with specific features, body types, or trends, perpetuating an unrealistic standard that can be unattainable. Often, physical beauty is associated with moral goodness or purity, especially in media and entertainment.[152] But beauty is subjective and multifaceted, encompassing a range of unique qualities. A primary emphasis on external appearance may cause insecurities in some,[153] while promoting a narrow or stereotyped view of what is beautiful.

At the same time, those considered conventionally attractive face their own challenges. They may be objectified, envied, or treated differently, making it difficult for others to see past their appearance. This can lead to confusion, entitlement, or difficulty forming authentic connections. When society fixates on appearance, it distorts both self-image and human relationships.

Know[3.4-87] Survivorship Bias (Follow Your Dreams):[154] the error of focusing only on those who succeed while ignoring those who do not. This is a form of sampling bias and distorts your understanding of success.

Popular culture reinforces this distortion by showcasing movie stars, athletes, musicians, and CEOs who beat the odds, dropped out of school, or rose from obscurity to fame. You have seen examples of those who say, "Follow your dreams," but they do not take into account the thousands like them who failed or had to change careers through no fault of their own.

Know[3.4-88] Closure Myth (…and they lived happily ever after):[155] Sometimes there is no happy ending, or even any ending at all. The need for closure is your desire to have a clear, firm answer so you can stop feeling confused or unsure. This is especially strong when you feel stressed or uncertain, because getting answers makes life feel easier to handle. But sometimes, especially when something is missing or unresolved, closure is not possible. Wanting closure is normal, but it can also lead you to rush decisions or ignore new information just to feel settled.

---

[149] https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/life-in-transition/202204/why-are-high-achievers-often-unhappy

[150] https://hqlo.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12955-020-01423-y

[151] https://www.everydayhealth.com/skin-beauty/attractive-people-how-society-defines-physical-attractiveness/

[152] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/moral-boundaries/202108/why-the-world-works-differently-the-most-beautiful

[153] https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/signs-insecurity

[154] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivorship_bias#Highly_competitive_career

[155] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closure_(psychology)

Know[3.4-89] How Societal Errors are Kept in Place

Next, I will attempt to explain some methods that I believe society uses to keep these errors in place. I am not a sociologist, but as members of a society, we have the right to try to understand the validity of beliefs held by the society in which we participate. Remember, many of the same processes that keep these errors in place likewise contribute to social cohesion. Without such "social glue," societies would fragment and collapse.

Educational Institutions:[156] Through formal curricula and informal socialization, schools transmit societal norms, beliefs, and practices. This process, known as cultural transmission, ensures that cultural heritage is preserved and passed down from one generation to the next.

The Overton Window:[157] defines the dynamic range of acceptable ideas and policies in a society. Policymakers and advocates aim to shape it strategically, either by promoting existing ideas or pushing boundaries to make once-fringe ideas more acceptable in mainstream discourse.

Groupthink:[158] refers to a psychological phenomenon within a cohesive group where the desire for consensus and harmony overrides independent decision-making. In a groupthink scenario, members prioritize unanimity and conformity, suppressing dissenting opinions or alternative viewpoints.

Sapir-Whorf Theory:[159] states that language shapes the way its speakers perceive and think about the world. This theory suggests that language actively influences and constrains cognitive processes.

Social Contagion:[160] spreads beliefs and behaviors through imitation and peer pressure. This reinforces societal errors by normalizing them, discouraging dissent, and making harmful norms seem acceptable or inevitable.

Newspeak:[161] a fictional language in George Orwell's "1984," is a tool of political control, designed to limit freedom of thought by eliminating words that could convey dissent. Some individuals argue that elements of Newspeak can be observed in modern Western society, where language manipulation is perceived as a means of control.[162]

Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute.

--George Orwell, "1984"

---

[156] https://www.toughconvos.com/post/why-leaders-should-care-how-culture-is-formed?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[157] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overton_window
[158] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupthink
[159] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic_relativity
[160] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_contagion
[161] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newspeak
[162] https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-news-media-becomes-fluent-in-newspeak-11595284117

Solutions to Societal Errors

Know[3.4-90] Socratic Questioning:[163] is a methodical and rigorous form of inquiry employed for exploring intricate ideas, uncovering truth, revealing assumptions, analyzing concepts, distinguishing knowledge from ignorance, tracing logical consequences of thought, and guiding discussions. This approach is rooted in the belief that thinking follows a structured logic, enabling the examination of underlying thoughts. What sets Socratic questioning apart is its systematic, disciplined, and profound nature, concentrating on fundamental concepts, principles, theories, or problems.

Socrates believed that once each person gained sufficient knowledge, he would become committed to excellence, because to do so was part of our "ultimate" nature.

--Christopher Phillips, "Six Questions of Socrates"

Socratic Questioning is a series of questions designed to encourage close examination of basic attitudes and beliefs.[164] Actively engaging with questions, such as those listed below, allows you to gain insights into your thought processes, challenge assumptions, and gain a deeper understanding of your own perspectives. If you find yourself believing and defending a position or issue without logical basis, ask yourself these questions.[165]

What do I really believe about this issue?
Can I articulate my thoughts more clearly?
Can I create a list of bullet points to summarize my position?
What assumptions am I making about this situation?
Are these assumptions valid, or is it something I want to believe?
What evidence supports my beliefs?
Are there any gaps or weaknesses in the evidence I'm relying on?
Who said it?
How do I know it is true?
How might someone with a different viewpoint see this?
What are the strengths and weaknesses of other perspectives?
What evidence supports their beliefs?
Why do we disagree (facts, biases, ego, assumptions)?
If my belief is true, what are the implications?
If my belief is NOT true, what are the implications?
What might be the consequences of holding this belief?
What might be the consequences of NOT holding this belief?
Why do I believe this question is important?
Are there underlying questions I have not considered?

These questions are useful to help you refine your beliefs. You may also ask these questions, or a subset of them, to others in order to lead them out of confusion. Only do so if you are invited to. It is the rare individual who tolerates their beliefs being questioned. Socrates, after all, was sentenced to drink poison for doing exactly that in ancient Athens.[166]

---

163 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_questioning
164 https://positivepsychology.com/socratic-questioning/
165 Modified list from: OpenAI. Virtual Assistant using GPT-3.5. Date: Nov 2023
166 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trial_of_Socrates#Death

Know[3.4-91] The 5 Whys:[167] this technique is a problem-solving method used to identify the root cause of an issue by asking "why" repeatedly. By examining each answer in sequence, the technique uncovers deeper contributing factors. This process helps individuals or teams move beyond surface symptoms and address the underlying problem. Although the standard is five questions, you may need more or fewer to reach the true cause. If you have ever answered a young child's persistent "why" questions, you already understand how effective and revealing this approach can be.

Example: The Screaming Alarm Clock
Why am I always late in the morning?
Because I hit snooze too many times.
Why do I hit snooze?
Because I am still tired.
Why am I still tired?
Because I stay up too late.
Why do I stay up late?
Because I scroll my phone in bed.
Why do I scroll my phone?
Because I do not want to face tomorrow yet.

Know[3.4-92] 4 Questions:[168] Your suffering is caused by believing stressful thoughts. Through self-inquiry, you can end this suffering.

The first step is to identify a thought or statement that cause stress, anxiety, or suffering. These can be judgments about yourself, others, or situations that you believe to be true. Carefully consider the statement that bothers you and reduce it to the simplest and most profound format possible.

Then, ask yourself these four questions, concerning the statement or idea:

Is it true?
Can you absolutely know that it's true?
How do you react when you believe that thought?
Who would you be without the thought?

Follow these questions with a "turn around"; find opposites of the original statement. Often a statement can be turned around to the self, to the other, and to the opposite. Not every statement has three turnarounds. Some may have just one or two, and others may have more than three. Some turnarounds may not make any sense to you. Do not force these.

Example turnarounds:[169]
To the self "He doesn't listen to me" becomes "I don't listen to myself"
To the other "He doesn't listen to me" becomes "I don't listen to him"
To the opposite "He doesn't listen to me" becomes "He does listen to me"

Regular practice of this process can lead to increased self-awareness, reduced stress and anxiety, improved relationships, and greater emotional resilience. (See Invert, Always Invert p. 304)

---

167 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_whys
168 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byron_Katie#Teachings
169 https://sobrief.com/books/loving-what-is

Thinking Errors Quick List

Cognitive Distortions

Catastrophizing p.319
All-or-Nothing Thinking p.319
Mind Reading p.320
Fortune Telling p.320
Labeling p.320
Emotional Reasoning p.320
Should, Must, Have to p.321
Personalization p.321
Blaming p.321
Always Being Right p.322
Overgeneralizing p.322
Disqualifying the Positive p.322
Mental Filtering p.322
Magical Thinking p.323

Relational Thinking Errors

Codependency p.324
People-pleasing p.324
Guilt-based Morality p.324
Conflict Avoidance p.324

Cognitive Biases

Confirmation Bias p.325
Egocentric Bias p.325
Anchoring Bias p.326
Hindsight Bias p.326
Normalcy Bias p.327
Dunning-Kruger Effect p.327
Availability Heuristic p.327
Cognitive Dissonance p.328
Fundamental Attribution p.328

Logical Fallacies

Ad Hominem p.329
Strawman p.329
Correlation / Causation p.329
False Dilemma p.330
Loaded Question p.330
Illusory Truth Effect p.330
Appeal to Authority p.331
Red Herring p.331
Reification p.331

Philosophical Thinking Errors

Map / Territory p.332
Abstraction Errors p.332
Time-binding Errors p.333
Know. of Mental Content p.333
Types of Knowledge p.334
Moral Relativism p.334
Happiness, Cause of p.335
Free Will p.336
Reductionism p.336
Descartes's Error p.336

Theological Errors p.337

Societal Errors

Romantic Love p.339
Success p.339
Happiness p.340
Beauty p.340
Survivorship Bias p.340
Closure Myth p.340

3.5 Emotion

Our emotions are important. But they're also kind of dumb. They're not able to think through consequences or consider multiple factors when acting. [They] overreact to things by design. They evolved to keep us alive when we were hunting water buffalo on the savannah… When we're scared we want to run away or hide. When we're angry we want to break stuff.

--Mark Manson

I've been going through some things lately, and I don't know what they are. I've been really emotional lately, and I don't know why.

--Blake, AA Member

Emotion Contents

1. About Emotion 345
2. Truths About Emotion 345
3. RULER 348
4. RaDaR 384

About Emotion[1]

Your emotions evolved over eons as adaptive responses to environmental conditions. Ancient survival mechanisms are still present in your reactions today. The tension, and cooperation, between your emotional and rational minds comes from that deep evolutionary wiring. These two minds coexist in constant dialogue. Both have value. Rather than competing, these two systems work together to help you navigate through life. When emotional insight and logical reasoning align, you become more adaptable, more resilient, and better equipped to handle complex situations.

Know[3.5-01] **Truths About Emotion**

1. Your emotional state influences every aspect of your life. It shapes how you perceive and engage with the world.[2] This includes decision-making, relationships, and well-being. Your emotions add color, meaning, and depth to your life.[3] If misunderstood and unregulated, they can cause you to make poor life decisions.[4]

---

[1] The structure and material for "Emotion" is largely (although not entirely) based on "Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive", 2019, by Marc Brackett, Ph.D. Other pertinent materials are referenced where appropriate.

[2] https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/emotional-wellbeing

[3] https://medium.com/@Belanet/how-would-life-be-without-emotions-cdcccc3b4794

[4] Brene Brown, "Daring Greatly", 2012, p90

3.5 Emotion

When we're anxious, disconnected, vulnerable, alone, and feeling helpless, the booze and food and work and endless hours online feel like comfort, but in reality they're only casting their long shadows over our lives.

--Brené Brown, "Daring Greatly"

2. Understanding your emotions is complicated because you have multiple brain systems working simultaneously.[5] The dynamic and competing nature of these systems often pull you in different directions, making it difficult to pin down exactly what you are feeling.

3. You experience two types of emotions: integral and incidental.[6] Integral emotions are directly tied to what is happening now, like feeling joyful while falling in love. Incidental emotions have no direct connection to the present situation, such as how resentment from an earlier event.

4. Some emotions are about other emotions, and called meta-emotions.[7] You can have a fear of heights and be embarrassed by your fear. Or you can be intimidated by your boss and be ashamed of feeling that way.

5. Related to emotions are feelings, moods, and personality traits. Emotions are the immediate and intense, often physiological reactions to a specific event or situation.[8] Feelings are the conscious experience of these emotional reactions.[9] Moods are more general and enduring emotional states that can influence your overall outlook.[10] Personality traits are the patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that shape your overall character.[11]

6. Emotions are not good or bad, they just are.[12] How you respond to emotions matters more than the emotion itself. Beliefs about anger, sadness, fear, or even joy shape your experience. If you treat emotions like threats, they become harder to manage. If you treat them like messengers, they become guides.

Emotions are real, but they are not you. Think of them as winds that blow through you. They are meaningful and powerful, but they pass. They are indicators of your internal state, not dictators of your behavior.

When I'm spiritually centered, my emotions provide wonderful guidance. When I'm not spiritually fit, my emotions get me in trouble. --Kathy, AA Member

Judging emotions creates shame. Accepting them creates space. You might have an angry self or an anxious self, parts of you asking to be heard. Instead of rejecting those parts, get to know them. Understanding what triggered the emotion is more helpful than trying to suppress it.

---

[5] https://welldoing.org/article/neuroscience-emotions
[6] https://www.forbesindia.com/article/rotman/incidental-vs.-integral-understanding-your-emotions/36949/1
[7] https://www.gottman.com/blog/meta-emotion-how-you-feel-about-feelings/
[8] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotion
[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feeling
[10] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hot-thought/201805/what-are-moods
[11] https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/personal-traits
[12] https://www.cityscapecounseling.com/post/emotions-are-neither-good-nor-bad/

7. Emotions are valuable, but they are not facts.[13] Emotions offer insight into your inner life and your environment.[14] They are signals, not commandments. Anxiety does not mean you are in danger. Anger does not always mean someone has wronged you. Emotions are subjective. Think of emotions (and feelings) as winds that blow through you. They are important, but you must use your mind to interpret them properly.

From my teens to my early 40s, I dealt with crippling depression. And part of that depression, I am convinced, was because I 'bought into' the emotion. I thought the world was a dark place, but I was carrying that dark place with me.

--Anonymous AA Member

8. You can understand your emotions, or judge them.[15] One leads to insight, the other to shame. Judging emotions blocks growth.[16] Suppressed emotions do not go away, they go underground. Approach your emotions with curiosity. Ask, "What is this trying to tell me? Where did it come from?" Emotional maturity comes from listening, not resisting.[17]

It is common to avoid "negative" emotions like fear or jealousy. It is just as common to feel unworthy of "positive" ones like love or pride. But all emotions are worth feeling. Say to yourself, "I'm feeling this right now. It might be uncomfortable, but it's okay." Reflect on messages you learned in childhood, ideas about what you were "allowed" to feel. Let those old rules go. Treat your feelings like guests. They deserve to be heard.

Sometimes I just have to feel my feelings.

--Ann, AA Member

9. Believing you can learn emotion skills shows faith in your ability to grow.[18] But, if you think your emotional makeup is fixed, you are less likely to invest time and effort in developing new skills.[19]

10. Your decisions often hinge on anticipating how your actions will make you feel.[20] Without emotion skills, you are not very good at knowing what makes you happy.[21] Many people find themselves pursuing misguided goals or avoiding activities that are good for them.[22]

---

[13] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-fitness/201310/feelings-aren-t-facts

[14] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/emotions

[15] https://positivepsychology.com/understanding-emotions/

[16] https://escholarship.org/content/qt20z2797j/qt20z2797j_noSplash_c794ad97fb3ee9eec8a64cac8973be2a.pdf

[17] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/some-assembly-required/201410/moving-toward-emotional-balance

[18] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/supersurvivors/201911/building-emotional-intelligence-isnt-hard-you-think

[19] https://www.specializedtherapy.com/the-fixed-mindset-and-its-ability-to-impact-life-and-learning/

[20] https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01614/full

[21] https://www.philosophymatters.org/why-arent-we-good-at-predicting-what-will-make-us-happy/

[22] https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-happiness-4869755

RULER[23]

> *Perhaps... you're in a beautiful mess because you are honoring your emotions.*
>
> --Amber, Intuitive Counselor

People who can understand and make use of their emotions are called "Emotionally Intelligent." While there are formal definitions of emotional intelligence, the term is easier to understand if you look at some of the qualities of emotionally intelligent people:[24]

Handle difficult situations effectively.
Communicate thoughts clearly.
Earn respect from others.
Can influence and persuade others.
Encourage support from others.
Maintain composure under pressure.
Identify emotional responses to people or situations.
Lead others effectively in negotiations.
Self-motivate for productivity.
Maintain a positive outlook, even in adversity.

To develop these qualities, five skills are necessary:[25]

Recognize emotions in yourself and others.
Understand your feelings, their source, and effects on your behavior.
Label your emotions accurately.
Express your feelings for effective communication.
Regulate your emotions with practical strategies.

And, if you look at the first letter of each of the skills listed, you will find they form an acronym, "RULER". These skills are described below.

Know[3.5-02] RULER: Recognize

Recognition is the first step in emotional intelligence, and an excellent tool for this is the Mood Meter.[26] It helps you recognize and understand your emotions. It has four quadrants on two axes: energy level and pleasantness. They each have a color, and are numbered in a clockwise direction:

Yellow I - top right
Green II - bottom right
Blue III - bottom left
Red IV - top left
(See Mood Meter Example p. 796)

---

[23] RULER and the Mood Meter are part of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's framework. For further reference, see "Permission to Feel", 2019, by Dr. Marc Brackett.
[24] Steven S. Stein, PhD., "Emotional Intelligence for Dummies", p12
[25] Marc Brackett, Ph.D., "Permission to Feel", 2019, p 23
[26] https://unhconnect.unh.edu/s/1518/images/gid4/editor_documents/moodmeter-2020.pdf

Yellow Zone (Think of sunshine) - Top Right Quadrant I. High energy and positive emotion. You may be feeling joy, excitement, or a sense of celebration. This quadrant reflects moments when your needs are being met, when you have accomplished a goal, received good news, or are anticipating something positive.

Green Zone (Think of relaxing in the park) - Bottom Right Quadrant II. Low energy and positive emotion. You feel calm, content, and grounded in the present moment. You are not trying to fix or solve anything. Your mind is at ease, and your needs are quietly being met.

Blue Zone (Think of "a blue mood") - Bottom Left Quadrant III. Low energy and unpleasant emotion. You may feel sadness, disappointment, or disconnection. Your thoughts tend to turn inward, often focusing on failure, loss, or unmet needs. These emotions suggest that something feels off, or that something important may be missing.

Red Zone (Think of “seeing red”) - Top Left Quadrant IV. High energy and unpleasant emotion. You feel anger, fear, or stress, intense emotions that heighten alertness and physical tension. These feelings often arise when your needs are not met, or when you perceive that they are not.

Remember: Emotions are indicators, not facts. The Mood Meter is not a diagnosis; it is a map. You do not have to have a specific or detailed label for your feelings yet, just the general idea of where you are at any given time.[27] I have been surprised by how often I find myself in the Blue or Red zones, Quadrants III and IV. Most often, it is due to my perception that my needs are not being met. But once I recognize that, I can begin to work with it.

Using the Mood Meter:

Ask yourself: "How am I feeling right now?"
Identify the quadrant that fits.
Then move on to the rest of the RULER process.

RULER: Understand

Understanding emotions involves gaining insights into why certain feelings arise in yourself and others. This contributes to more empathetic and informed responses. Reflective questioning is a valuable approach for gaining this kind of insight. Keep these issues in mind:

Having some insight into your own or another's emotions does not make you a mental health expert. Do not be afraid to self-refer, or recommend to someone, professional help when it seems warranted.

The techniques of empathy are not empathy. By seeking to understand another person, you have an obligation to not misuse any insight, understanding, or trust you gain from them.

---

27 https://heartmindonline.org/resources/boost-emotional-intelligence-with-the-mood-meter

Know[3.5-03] Questions you can ask YOURSELF to understand YOUR OWN EMOTIONS.

Start by asking yourself why you feel a certain way or what might be triggering those emotions. Explore the underlying thoughts and beliefs influencing your emotional state. Regularly asking yourself these questions helps you understand your emotions and improve self-awareness:

What am I feeling right now? Consider if your energy is high or low, and if your emotions are pleasant or unpleasant. You are tuning in, not judging.

Why am I feeling this way? What might have triggered this emotion? Understanding the context is often the first key to working with it.

Are there patterns in my emotions? Recognizing patterns can help you anticipate emotional responses and shift them when needed.

How intense is my emotion? On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong is this feeling? Rating it gives insight into the emotion's urgency or root significance.

What thoughts are tied to this emotion? Are they realistic, or shaped by distorted beliefs? Questioning your inner narrative is a powerful tool.

What physical sensations am I experiencing? Notice tightness, butterflies, or a racing heart. These sensations are clues to what is going on inside.

Is this feeling familiar? Have you felt this way in the past? Familiarity can help you tap into previous experiences and coping strategies.

How would I describe this emotion to someone else? Putting feelings into words helps. Imagine explaining it to a friend; what would you say?

What do I want to happen next? Emotions often point to unmet needs, what would meeting that need look like?

Is this emotion connected to my values or beliefs? Emotions can arise when something important to us is threatened or affirmed.

Am I reacting to the present, or the past? Some strong emotions are echoes of earlier wounds. Ask yourself if the intensity belongs fully to this moment.

How do I usually express this emotion? Do you withdraw, lash out, shut down, or over explain? Awareness is the first step to changing them.

What would I tell a friend? Imagine someone you care about feeling this way. What would you say to them? Now, say it to yourself.

How can I take care of myself right now? Identify small actions that support your well-being. Emotional care is often physical care, too.

What can I learn from this emotion? Every feeling carries information. Even the difficult ones offer insight into your needs, boundaries, and beliefs.

Tips for Understanding Your Emotions:

Practice Self-Compassion: Be kind to yourself; experiencing a range of emotions is a natural part of being human. (See Self-Compassion p. 379)

Know Your Values: Reflection on your core values can clarify your feelings. (See Values Clarification p. 166)

Learn from Your Patterns: Recognizing patterns helps you anticipate and manage emotions more effectively.

Seek Feedback: Ask for feedback from trusted friends or family members on how they perceive your emotional expressions.

Connect with Your Body: Pay attention to physical sensations associated with emotions. (See Relaxation for Mindfulness p. 406)

Know[3.5-04] Questions you can ask YOURSELF to understand SOMEONE ELSE'S emotions.

Emotional intelligence is not just about understanding yourself; but tuning in to the emotional lives of others, as well. By asking thoughtful questions and reflecting seriously on the experiences of another person, you deepen your empathy and contribute to a more supportive environment. The goal is not to solve, fix, or interpret, but to understand. Ask yourself these questions to better understand someone else's emotional state:

What emotion do I think they are experiencing? Begin with an honest observation. What feeling seems present in their tone, posture, or behavior?

What could be the triggers or causes of their emotions? What events or interactions might be influencing how they feel?

Have they expressed this emotion before? Have you seen them respond this way in similar situations? Context often brings clarity to present reactions.

How intense does their emotion seem? Is it subtle and quiet, or does it seem overwhelming and disruptive?

What verbal and nonverbal cues are they displaying? Listen to what they say, and pay close attention to body language, facial expressions, and tone.

Is there a discrepancy between their words and actions? If what they say does not match what they do, they may be hiding or unaware of what they feel.

What might they be thinking right now? Consider their thought process. Are they struggling with distorted thinking, or seeing the situation clearly?

How would they describe their emotion? Put yourself in their shoes. How might they explain their feelings if they felt safe enough to speak freely?

What might be their desired outcome or resolution? Consider what they might need right now. Are they seeking comfort, reassurance, or space?

Are there cultural or personal factors influencing their emotions? Background, personality, and experiences all help to shape emotions.

Have they experienced any recent life changes or stressors? Even small changes can ripple into emotional responses.

What support or understanding might they need right now? Consider what would help, not what would fix. Support often means just being there.

What would I feel in their situation? Use your own emotional memory to connect. What would you need if you were in their place?

Is their emotion aligned with their values or beliefs? Strong emotional responses often reflect when something important is affirmed or threatened.

How can I communicate my understanding and support? Presence, empathy, and gentle attention go a long way.

Know[3.5-05] Questions you can ask SOMEONE ELSE to understand THEIR EMOTIONS.

But all work with people should be based on prayer. If we say a little prayer before we speak or try to help, it will make us more effective.

--Hazeldon Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", Dec 29

When seeking to understand someone else's emotions, asking thoughtful and open-ended questions can be helpful. Be compassionate and respectful, and stop immediately if you meet any resistance. Active listening, empathy, and a nonjudgmental attitude are key. Tailor your questions based on the specific situation and the level of trust in your relationship with the person. Here are some examples of the kinds of questions you can ask:

How are you feeling right now? Start with a broad and open question to invite them to express their emotions.

Can you tell me what happened? Encourage them to share the specific events or situations that led to their current emotional state.

Is there something specific on your mind? Probe for any thoughts or concerns that might be influencing their emotions.

Do you usually feel this way, or is this unusual for you? Explore whether their current emotions are part of a pattern or if this is an unusual occurrence.

What can I do to support you right now? Offer your assistance and express a willingness to provide support in a way that aligns with their needs.

Do you want to talk about it, or would you rather be alone? Respect their preferences regarding whether they want to talk or if they need some space.

How can I better understand what you are going through? Invite them to share more about their perspective and experiences.

Are there any triggers or factors that contributed to your emotions? Encourage them to reflect on anything that played a role in their response.

Are there past experiences that influence how you feel now? Explore whether their current emotions are connected to past experiences.

What do you need right now to feel supported? Ask about their needs and how you can contribute to creating a supportive environment.

How do you typically cope with emotions? Inquire about their coping mechanisms and strategies for managing emotions.

Are you comfortable sharing more about your emotions? Respect their comfort level and ensure that the conversation remains a safe space.

Can you describe the sensations or physical effects you are feeling? Explore the physical aspects of their emotions, such as tension or discomfort.

Do you think your emotions are connected to your values or beliefs? Consider whether their response aligns with their core values and beliefs.

Is there anything else you want me to know or understand? Give them the opportunity to share additional thoughts or feelings.

Tips for Understanding Someone Else's Emotions:

Empathetic Listening: Focus on active listening. Let the person express their emotions without interrupting, and show empathy through your responses.

Validate Their Feelings: Acknowledge and validate the other person's emotions. Let them know that their feelings are heard and respected.

Be Open to Different Perspectives: Understand that people may have different emotional responses to the same situation.

Ask Follow-Up Questions: If the person is comfortable, ask follow-up questions. This shows genuine interest and empathy.

Consider Cultural Differences: Cultural backgrounds can shape how emotions are experienced and communicated.

Avoid Assumptions: Refrain from making assumptions about what someone else is feeling. Instead, ask clarifying questions to avoid misunderstandings.

Respect Boundaries: Recognize and respect if the person prefers not to discuss their emotions in detail. Everyone has different comfort levels.

Look for Nonverbal Cues: Nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, often convey emotions more accurately than words.

Build Trust: Foster a trusting relationship. People are more likely to open up about their emotions when they feel safe and supported.

RULER: Label[28]

Labeling emotions helps you understand and express how you feel. A rich emotional vocabulary allows for clearer communication and deeper awareness. Using the same words daily can block emotional insight, while accurate labeling bridges the gap between feeling, understanding, and expressing emotions. It is essential for processing and regulating emotions, making the vague clearer and more manageable.

---

[28] Marc Brackett, PhD, "Permission to Feel", p101-102

Labeling your emotions has multiple benefits. It provides context to your feelings, and creates a model that you can think and talk about, and compare to other feelings and experiences. When you can communicate what you feel, other people can understand you better and help you when you need it.

When your understanding of your emotions becomes an avenue of communication, it strengthens and deepens your connections with other people. You can identify with the feelings of others, and communicate your own feelings better to help them understand you.

Know[3.5-06] Feeling Words

The 100 feeling words below are divided into four lists based on the Mood Meter.[29] Remember that feelings are subjective and vary between cultures and personal experiences. Try generating your own lists of feeling words, based on your personal experiences.

Use these words to identify how you feel. You can use more than one. Being specific helps you better understand yourself in different situations. Use the phrase, "I feel…", followed by a word or words from the list.

Q1-Yellow (Top Right, Needs Met): High Pleasantness, High Energy

Blissful: Extremely happy and content.
Cheerful: Happy and positive.
Ecstatic: Overwhelmed with joy or happiness.
Elated: Very happy or joyful, often due to a specific event.
Energized: Filled with energy, enthusiasm, or vitality.
Enthusiastic: Eager and excited, showing enthusiasm.
Excited: Eager and enthusiastic, often in anticipation of something.
Exhilarated: Extremely happy, elated, or invigorated.
Festive: Celebratory and joyful, often related to a special event.
Focused: Concentrated and attentive on a specific goal.
Happy: Feeling or showing pleasure, contentment, or joy.
Hopeful: Feeling optimistic, expecting positive outcomes.
Hyper: Extremely energetic, excited, or overactive.
Inspired: Filled with creative or motivational energy.
Joyful: Full of joy and happiness.
Lively: Energetic, animated, and full of life.
Motivated: Driven and determined to achieve goals or take action.
Optimistic: Expecting positive outcomes, hopeful about the future.
Pleasant: Agreeable and enjoyable, giving a sense of pleasure.
Playful: Full of play, fun, or a sense of humor.
Pleased: Satisfied and content with a situation or outcome.
Proud: Feeling a sense satisfaction in one's achievements or qualities.
Surprised: Taken aback or shocked by an unexpected event.
Thrilled: Extremely excited and pleased.
Upbeat: Positive, optimistic, or lively in attitude.

---

[29] https://unhconnect.unh.edu/s/1518/images/gid4/editor_documents/moodmeter-2020.pdf

Q2-Green (Bottom Right, Needs Met): High Pleasantness, Low Energy

At Ease: Feeling comfortable and relaxed.
Balanced: Having a sense of equilibrium and stability.
Blessed: Feeling fortunate and grateful for one's circumstances.
Calm: Serene and free from disturbance or agitation.
Carefree: Unconcerned and relaxed, without worries.
Chill: Calm and relaxed, often in a laid-back manner.
Comfortable: Feeling at ease and physically relaxed.
Complacent: Satisfied with one's current situation.
Content: Satisfied and at peace with one's circumstances.
Cozy: Warm, comfortable, and snug.
Easygoing: Relaxed and flexible in one's approach to life.
Fulfilled: Content with one's achievements and life experiences.
Grateful: Feeling thankful and appreciative.
Loving: Expressing or feeling affection and care.
Mellow: Calm, easygoing, and relaxed in demeanor.
Peaceful: Tranquil and free from disturbance.
Relaxed: Unwound and at ease, without tension.
Restful: Providing a sense of rest and relaxation.
Secure: Feeling safe and protected.
Satisfied: Content and pleased with a situation or outcome.
Serene: Calm, peaceful, and untroubled.
Sleepy: Tired and ready for sleep.
Thoughtful: Considerate and reflective in one's actions.
Touched: Moved or emotionally affected.
Tranquil: Calm and peaceful, free from disturbance.

Q3-Blue (Bottom Left, Needs Not Met): Low Pleasantness, Low Energy

Alienated: Feeling isolated or estranged from others.
Apathetic: Lacking interest or enthusiasm.
Bored: Uninterested or unengaged.
Depressed: Intense sadness, low mood, hopelessness.
Desolate: Feeling empty and abandoned.
Despairing: Experiencing a sense of hopelessness.
Despondent: Feeling downcast and without hope.
Discouraged: Disheartened and lacking motivation.
Disappointed: Let down or dissatisfied with a result.
Disgusted: Revolted or repulsed by something.
Disheartened: Feeling dispirited or discouraged.
Down: Feeling sad or low in spirits.
Drained: Depleted of energy or vitality.
Exhausted: Extremely tired and fatigued.
Fatigued: Tired and weary.
Glum: Gloomy or dejected in appearance.
Hopeless: Feeling without hope or optimism.
Lonely: Isolated and lacking companionship.
Miserable: Unhappy or suffering.
Morose: Gloomy and sullen in disposition.
Pessimistic: Expecting negative outcomes, lacking optimism.
Sad: Feeling sorrowful or unhappy.

Spent: Physically or emotionally exhausted.
Sullen: Sulky or resentfully silent.
Tired: Fatigued or lacking energy.

Q4-Red (Top Left, Needs Not Met): Low Pleasantness, High Energy

Angry: Feeling displeasure or resentment.
Annoyed: Slightly irritated or bothered.
Anxious: Experiencing unease or nervousness.
Apprehensive: Anxious or fearful about the future.
Concerned: Worried or interested in a particular matter.
Enraged: Extremely angry or furious.
Frightened: Feeling fear or apprehension.
Frustrated: Feeling thwarted or disappointed.
Fuming: Extremely angry and emitting anger.
Furious: Intensely angry or enraged.
Irritated: Annoyed or provoked to displeasure.
Jittery: Nervous or uneasy.
Livid: Extremely angry and visibly enraged.
Nervous: Anxious or uneasy about something.
Panicked: In a state of sudden, intense fear or anxiety.
Peeved: Annoyed or irritated.
Repulsed: Feeling strong aversion or disgust.
Restless: Unable to relax or be still.
Shocked: Stunned or profoundly surprised.
Stressed: Experiencing mental or emotional pressure.
Stunned: Overwhelmed and temporarily unable to react.
Tense: Anxious or on edge.
Troubled: Distressed or concerned.
Uneasy: Feeling discomfort or apprehension.
Worried: Anxious or concerned about something.

RULER: Express

Expressing emotions means communicating in a way that is authentic, respectful, and appropriate to the moment. It involves sharing your feelings with others. And it strengthens relationships when others feel free to express their emotions in return.

Expressing your emotions has benefits:[30]

Fewer trips to the doctor.
Better immune function.
Lower blood pressure.
Mood enhancement.
Less stress.
Better work attendance.

---

[30] Marc Brackett, Ph.D., "Permission to Feel", ebook p 128

Expressing Your Emotions Verbally

Expressing your emotions supports well-being and deepens connection. It can be as simple as having an honest talk with someone you trust, a friend, family member, or therapist. Using "I" statements helps you take ownership of what you feel. I recently saw a mental health professional just to unload some tough emotions, and I felt much better afterward.

Know[3.5-07] Keep these items in mind when expressing your emotions:

Do not use the desire to express your emotions as an excuse to unload on everyone you meet, overshare with the wrong people, or create awkward situations. Think before you speak, be clear about what you are sharing, why you are sharing it, and with whom.[31]

If you were taught to suppress your emotions, expressing yourself may feel unnatural. I used to show up for counseling with plenty on my mind, but once I got there, the urge to talk was gone. I thought of it as being in a different "mode." Writing things down when you feel them can help. Later, use those notes to re-engage when the time is right.

When expressing emotions, take ownership.[32] Say "I felt angry," not "You made me angry." This keeps the focus on your experience and reduces defensiveness. Still, people shaped by different backgrounds may hear blame anyway. Be clear that you are not accusing, just expressing how you feel.

Be honest about your emotions.[33] Do not minimize or mask them with humor, genuine connection comes from honesty. These conversations might feel awkward, but they often go better than you expect.

Do not expect an immediate response. [34] Sharing emotions can catch others off guard, especially if it is new for you. Let them know you are not expecting a quick reply—just offering space for honesty.

Be ready to listen.[35] Expressing emotions starts a conversation, not a monologue. Ask questions, value their viewpoint, and never assume you know how they feel. But if the other person is dishonest or abusive, you are not required to keep listening.

Keep the conversation on track.[36] When you express difficult emotions, others may deflect by bringing up unrelated issues or getting defensive. Acknowledge their concerns, but gently steer things back. Let them know you are open to talk later, but right now, you are focusing on owning and expressing your feelings.

---

31 Brene Brown, PhD, "Daring Greatly", p99-100
32 https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.1 Take Owner…"
33 https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.2 Be Honest…"
34 https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.4 Allow the Other…"
35 https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.5 Be Ready to Listen"
36 https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.6 Avoid Letting…"

Choose the right time.[37] Emotional talks can take time, so consider the moment carefully. Avoid vague or ominous warnings like "We need to talk," especially when the other person is busy or away. Aim for a time when both of you are able to listen and connect. You might want to delay the conversation if:

One of you is going somewhere soon.
You are in the middle of a heated argument.
The other person is dealing with a significant life event.

Plan how to end the conversation.[38] Emotional talks can be tough, so closing in a positive manner is important. Know your goals and how you will recognize when they are met. With a partner, this might be a hug; with a boss, an action plan. If the ending feels unclear, it's okay to ask, whether for reassurance, or a scheduled follow-up.

Sharing emotions strengthens relationships.[39] Do not feel selfish for expressing yourself—it offers others insight into who you are. Honest, tactful expression sets clear boundaries and deepens connection.

Expressing Your Emotions Nonverbally

Expressing your emotions through creative and physical activities is a common and therapeutic practice. Here are a few examples:

Regular journaling helps you connect with your emotions, reflect on your feelings, and understand yourself better.[40] It can also reveal patterns, like what triggers insecurity or brings confidence and calm.

Art is a powerful medium for expressing emotions.[41] Drawing, painting, and other artistic endeavors can reflect your inner feelings. You do not need to be a skilled artist; the process is what is important.

Music expresses what words often cannot.[42] Whether you play, sing, or listen, it can help you release deep emotions in a personal, meaningful way.

Gardening is a therapeutic way to connect with nature and your emotions.[43] Nurturing plants can reflect caring for yourself, while the physical activity helps reduce stress and lift your mood.

Physical exercise helps manage emotions by reducing anxiety, lifting mood, and releasing frustration.[44] Choose activities that match your needs.

---

[37] https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.7 Pick a good time…"
[38] https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.8 Think About How…"
[39] https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/, "3.9 Remember that…"
[40] https://socialself.com/blog/express-emotions/ "1.3 Keep a Journal"
[41] https://www.artsacad.net/the-importance-of-expressing-emotion-through-art/
[42] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/naked-truth/201410/music-is-what-feelings-sound
[43] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-act-be/201906/10-mental-health-benefits-gardening
[44] https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/sites/psych.ucsf.edu/files/EMOTION%20 REGULATION%20SKILLS%20MANUAL%20e-version.pdf

Be Aware of the Nonverbal Cues You Are Sending

Throughout your day, you are constantly sending out nonverbal cues, often without realizing it.[45] These cues, which include facial expressions, body movements, gestures, and tone of voice, can express emotions that you are unaware of. They can significantly impact how others perceive you.[46] For example:[47]

Know[3.5-08] Nonverbal Communication

Facial Expression: Reveals emotions like anger, surprise, fear, or sadness.
Gaze: Shows your level of interest.
Eye Contact: Conveys feelings like interest, anger, or attraction.
Gestures: Can emphasize or replace words.
Posture: Leaning in shows interest; folded arms can show resistance.
Closeness: Personal distance varies by culture and relationship.
Clothes: What you wear communicates identity and status.
Grooming: Cleanliness and personal care send strong social signals.
Tone of Voice: Loud, soft, fast, slow, adds context to your words.

Being mindful of these cues improves communication and helps build stronger relationships. Notice what your nonverbal signals are saying

Know[3.5-09] Allowing Others to Express Their Emotions[48]

Creating a space where others feel safe expressing emotions is a powerful skill. Practice with these key habits:

Listen actively: Show people they are heard by listening with empathy.
Be present: Put away distractions and give your full attention.
Validate feelings: Acknowledge their emotions without judgment.
Watch body language: stay attuned to gestures and expressions.
Invite dialogue: Open conversations about feelings and share your own.
Respect boundaries: Support others at their pace; offer help, not pressure.

These habits build trust, strengthen relationships, and support emotional well-being.

RULER: Regulate

You do not want to become an emotionless robot, nor could you be, even if you tried.[49] Suppression of emotions (sometimes called "stuffing your feelings")[50] has a deleterious effect.[51] Regulating your emotions (or "managing", if you prefer), is an approach where you acknowledge and try to understand your feelings without suppressing or stifling them.

---

45 https://www.verywellmind.com/types-of-nonverbal-communication-2795397
46 https://www.iedunote.com/nonverbal-communication
47 https://positivepsychology.com/nonverbal-communication-cues/
48 https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/emotional-support#avoid-advice
49 Alas, a final goodbye to my childhood idol, Mr. Spock. "Live long, and prosper." Life is not possible without emotion, but if it was, it would be a flat and colorless existence.
50 https://www.personalitycoding.com/post/stop-stuffing-your-emotions-a-guide-to-processing-and-expressing-your-feelings-in-a-healthy-way
51 https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11031-019-09774-w

Managing, responding, and adapting to emotions in a healthy way helps you to have a better life. Emotional regulation allows you to make thoughtful decisions and maintain emotional balance.

> *…these are the things my Higher Power uses to refine me as a person.*
>
> --Tim, AA Member

Emotions trigger automatic physical responses through your nervous system. The sympathetic system activates during stress, raising heart rate and preparing you for action.[52] The parasympathetic system calms the body, restoring balance.[53] These systems work together, but lingering on fear or anger keeps your body in stress mode. Activities like exercise or meditation can help activate your calming system.

When emotions like grief or anger overwhelm you, self-help may not be enough. Therapists can help unpack deeper emotions and offer real strategies. Seeking help is a strength, not a weakness.

To manage difficult emotions, first try to understand them. You cannot stop a feeling once it hits, but you can choose how to respond. Emotions, like thoughts, can be believed or questioned. You can "buy into" your emotions, or you can manage them in an intelligent and mature way.[54]

Use tools that affect your thoughts, feelings, and actions—the cognitive triangle. Track what works for you. Be patient and compassionate with yourself as you learn what helps.

Finally, a great strategy to manage negative emotions is to adopt emotional states that are more realistic and useful. Instead of living on the left side of the Mood Meter, in Quadrants 3 and 4, make a persistent effort to spend more time on the right side, Q1 and Q2.

Regulating Negative Emotions

Know[3.5-10] Anger and Resentment

> *You will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger.*
>
> --Buddha

Anger and resentment are often linked but are fundamentally different.[55] Anger is a reaction to a present threat, injustice, or frustration. It comes fast, burns hot, and often fades quickly. Resentment is slower and deeper. It lingers. It arises from unresolved past hurts, perceived wrongs, or chronic bitterness. Anger is about now. Resentment is about then.

Both can be managed through self-awareness, honest communication, problem-solving, and self-care. But each requires its own approach.

---

[52] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sympathetic_nervous_system

[53] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasympathetic_nervous_system

[54] Matthew McKay, PhD, et al, "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Interpersonal Problems", p70

[55] https://powerfullyrecovered.com/anger-resentment-difference/

Know[3.5-11] Five Styles of Anger[56]

Identifying your anger style helps you understand how it shapes your behavior and relationships.

1. Aggressive: Control through force
Traits: Confrontational, dominant, manipulative.
Methods: Sarcasm, put-downs, threats.
Impact: Seeks control, often damages trust.

2. Passive: Avoidance through silence
Traits: Conflict-avoidant, overly accommodating.
Methods: Suppresses feelings, avoids discussion.
Impact: Builds internal stress and guilt.

3. Passive-Aggressive: Retaliation through subtlety
Traits: Indirect, hides anger.
Methods: Silent treatment, withdrawal, gossip.
Impact: Feels two-faced; erodes connection.

4. Projective-Aggressive: Anger by proxy
Traits: Disowns anger.
Methods: Manipulates others into expressing it.
Impact: Confuses relationships; anger is displaced.

5. Assertive: Expression with respect
Traits: Honest, direct, self-aware.
Methods: Calm expression of needs.
Impact: Builds trust and emotional maturity.

I had to admit that my own anger style was (and still is) usually passive-aggressive. Shame keeps me stuck. Honesty moves me forward.

Know[3.5-12] Tracking Anger[57]

Awareness is the first step toward change. Try a one-week anger log. Track how often and how intensely you get angry. Review patterns. Note recurring triggers. This becomes your anger map.

Date	Intensity	Situation
Tue May 2	4	Joel missed payment
Thu May 4	2	Lunch took forever
Fri May 5	8	Cut off in traffic

Catalysts and Triggers

You are more likely to struggle with anger if:
You live with high stress, toxic people, or unresolved trauma.
You lean toward impatience, intensity, or compulsiveness.
You rely on alcohol, stimulants, or sedatives.
You lack sleep, support, or emotional outlets.

---

[56] https://myhopewell.com/5-anger-styles/
[57] W. Doyle Gentry, PhD, "Anger Management for Dummies", p19-20

Anger is often rooted in deeper needs: feeling disrespected, ignored, controlled, or dismissed.

Know[3.5-13] When Anger Helps and Hurts

Helpful Anger:[58,59]
Motivates change.
Defends boundaries.
Energizes action.

Harmful Anger:[60,61]
Destroys relationships.
Masks deeper feelings.
Damages health and peace of mind.

> *A burst of temper could spoil a day...*
>
> --Bill W., "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p. 90

Anger activates your sympathetic nervous system. Recognizing the signs gives you a chance to intervene. Know your warning signs:[62]

Racing heart, tight chest, clenched fists.
Tunnel vision, harsh tone, shallow breath.
Adrenaline surge, flushed skin, dizziness.

I have been angry for most of my life. Anger is the hot flame that burns on the smouldering coals of resentment. Not only did it affect my relationships and behavior, it made me absolutely miserable!

I finally decided that I could no longer view my anger as a trivial, peripheral issue. It was real, a nearly daily occurrence, and causing serious problems. I had to confront it head-on, every day, and do something about it.

Anger is addictive. The adrenaline that accompanies a rush of anger has extraordinary physiological effects on your mind and body.

What I learned about anger:
Anger is a cheap drug: it gives a self-righteous rush of adrenaline.
Anger masks shame, hurt, fear, and vulnerability.
Chronic anger steals joy and connection.
Disproportionate anger usually points to a deeper reservoir.
Afterward, anger leaves a hangover: tired, sick, and ashamed.

---

[58] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-savvy-psychologist/202007/why-being-angry-is-okay-and-even-helpful
[59] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-wisdom-of-anger/202306/11-good-reasons-to-get-angry
[60] https://www.healthline.com/health/anger-issues
[61] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mind-body-connection/202007/what-causes-anger-and-how-it-affects-the-body
[62] https://www.frontrangecounselingcenter.com/physical-cues-of-anger/

Know[3.5-14] Responding to Anger

Try setting up a daily anger practice:[63]

Morning:
Deep breathing.
Pray for awareness and peace.
Mentally rehearse handling triggers.

During the Day:
Step away from known triggers if possible.
Use micro-workouts to release tension.
Stay mindful of patterns and perspectives.

Evening:
Reflect in a journal.
Admit when you were wrong.
Practice relaxation.
Plan for tomorrow's recurring challenges.

About Resentment

Resentment is the "number one" offender.

--Alcoholics Anonymous, p64

Resentment is the poison you drink hoping someone else will die.

--AA Aphorism

Resentment is long-haul anger. It does not burn, it corrodes. In recovery, it is seen as a spiritual sickness.[64] Resentment cannot coexist with spiritual health. If anger or resentment is disrupting your daily life or relationships, seek help. Resentment blocks growth, love, and peace. It keeps you tied to the past.

Know[3.5-15] Responding to Resentment

Acknowledge it without shame.
Reflect on the deeper wound underneath.
Reframe your thinking and perspective.
Practice forgiveness (not permission).
Replace old narratives with balanced ones.

For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

---

[63] Resulting from a combination of personal practices and research:
https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/anger-management.htm
https://www.verywellmind.com/anger-management-strategies-4178870
https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/anger_management_workbook_508_compliant.pdf
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsVq5R_F6RA&t=171s&ab_channel=watchwellcast

[64] World Services Organization, "Alcoholics Anonymous", p64

Know[3.5-16] Fear and Anxiety

Fear is a primal response. You have likely heard quotes that try to remove its power, like Roosevelt's "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." In recovery, I heard acronyms like "False Evidence Appearing Real" or "Face Everything and Recover." At a discussion group, I once heard someone say, "Fear is a lie." These are attempts to reframe fear. Sometimes they help. But fear is a physical reaction and often resists logic.

Sometimes fear is valid. It may be pointing to a real danger or a situation that needs your attention. But the feelings themselves do not tell you what to do. Look at the fear, and ask what it is trying to say. Only then can you decide whether to take action, seek support, or let it pass.

Whether you are standing before an audience, lying awake with worry, or facing a real threat, your body reacts the same way. Your heart races, your breathing shortens, your muscles tense.[65] Your body believes you are in danger. This is the work of your sympathetic nervous system, priming you to fight or flee. Once the threat is gone, your parasympathetic system begins to restore balance, slowing your heart, relaxing your muscles, and bringing your body back to rest.[66]

Fear can take many forms.[67] While they may differ in cause, but they often feel the same in your body:

Fear is your natural response to danger, whether the threat is real or imagined. It sharpens your senses and prepares your body to take immediate action. In many situations, fear is useful—it helps keep you alive.

Irrational fear is out of proportion to the actual situation. You may know there is no real danger, but your body and mind still react as if there is. These fears can be rooted in past trauma, faulty beliefs, or subconscious associations.

Anxiety is a lingering sense of unease or dread, often without a clear or immediate cause. You may feel restless, distracted, or tense without knowing exactly why. Anxiety tends to focus on the future, generating worry about what might happen.

Phobia is an intense, focused fear of a specific object, situation, or activity. It goes beyond discomfort and causes avoidance or distress that interferes with daily life. Even when you know the fear is exaggerated, it can feel impossible to control.

Panic is a sudden flood of overwhelming fear, often accompanied by physical symptoms like tightness in your chest, shortness of breath, or dizziness. It may feel like something terrible is about to happen, even if there is no visible danger. Panic attacks can be terrifying and disorienting, leaving you feeling confused and powerless.

---

65 Heller, PhD, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Conquering Fear and Anxiety", 1999, p4
66 Ibid. p5
67 Ibid. p6-7

Know[3.5-17] Responding to Fear and Anxiety

Fear is not weakness; it is information. What matters is how you respond.

I have to consciously choose, in my head, to not think about [my fears] anymore, because that will hurt me… fear is worshipping my problems.

--Heather, AA Member

Breathe:[68] Sit with your back straight, head up, and eyes closed or gently unfocused. Let your body relax and breathe naturally. This posture helps calm your nervous system and begins to ease the fear response.

Name it: Use the RaDaR method: Reflect, Describe, Respond. Say to yourself, "I feel afraid because..." Labeling your fear helps you create space between what you feel and what you do. (See RaDaR p. 384)

Reality check:[69] Ask yourself, "Is this danger happening now? Or is it a memory, a projection, or a story?" Breaking it down into specific concerns helps you regain perspective.

Be mindful:[70] Most fear lives in thoughts about the future. You do not have to be swept away by it. Instead of saying, "Everything is terrible," say, "I notice that I feel afraid."

Move:[71] Get up. Stretch. Walk. Shake out your hands. Exercise discharges adrenaline, which can help to relieve anxiety.

Talk to someone: Speak your fear to someone you trust. Say it out loud. You may be surprised how much lighter it feels when it is shared.

Accept your fear:[72] Do not reject your fear, let it be. You are allowed to feel it. Fear is part of being human, and denying it only gives it more power. Instead, observe it with curiosity. Listen to what it has to say.

Act anyway: Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the willingness to move forward despite it. Take the next right step, even if your knees are shaking.

Practice Facing It:[73] The more you face fear mindfully, the more familiar it becomes. Exposure, done gently and with awareness, can retrain your brain. Courage builds through repetition.

Get help if you need it: If fear or anxiety begins to take over your life, seek help from a trained professional. Therapy, counseling, or support groups can provide tools, guidance, and safety. Asking for help is not failure, it is wisdom. If fear begins to interfere with your daily life, or if you suffer from panic attacks, seek professional support. You are not alone. (See Step 4 p. 81; Long Inventory Self-Format p. 178)

---

[68] Paul Wilson, "The Calm Technique", 1985, p43

[69] Byron Katie, "Loving What Is", 2002, p147-155

[70] Sam Harris, "Waking Up", 2015, Blinkist.com Summary

[71] Charles H. Elliot PhD and Laura Smith PhD, "Anxiety for Dummies", 2021, p301

[72] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/202004/mental-hygiene-now-managing-suddenly-spiking-fear

[73] Marjie Warrel, "Brave", 2015, Blinkist.com Summary

Know[3.5-18] Grief

Grief typically arises from a significant loss, most often the death of a loved one. It brings intense feelings of sadness, longing, and emptiness, especially during the early stages. Over time, these emotions often soften, though the loss may always be felt. Grief is also marked by yearning, nostalgia, and a desire to reconnect with what was lost.

Support can help. Counseling, peer support, and grief groups provide a space to process emotions and feel less alone.[74] Grief does not follow a fixed path, but one widely known framework is to view it in five stages.[75] These are not linear, nor universal, but they offer a way to understand some of what you might feel:

Denial: A temporary refusal to accept the loss, offering emotional protection from the initial shock.

Anger: Resentment toward yourself, others, or even the person lost, as the pain begins to surface.

Bargaining: Attempts to negotiate with fate, a higher power, or yourself in hopes of reversing the loss.

Depression: Deep sadness, loneliness, and despair as the weight of the loss fully settles in.

Acceptance: A growing ability to live with the loss, not by forgetting, but by finding a way to carry it and move forward.

These stages may overlap, repeat, or occur out of order. Some may not appear at all. Grief is deeply personal, and there is no "correct" way to grieve. Everyone's experience is different.

Responding to Grief[76]

Grief is not a problem to be solved, but a process to be lived through. It shows up as waves of pain, longing, numbness, or even guilt. At times, it can feel like it will never end. The experience of grief may bring with it the "three P’s": personalization (blaming yourself), pervasiveness (believing everything is affected), and permanence (thinking it will never get better). Recognizing these patterns can help you step outside of them. Grief may not disappear, but it becomes something you carry with more strength over time.

You do not have to walk through grief alone. In fact, avoiding the subject, whether you are grieving or supporting someone who is, can deepen the sense of isolation. Journaling small daily wins can remind you that life still holds value. Rediscovering simple joys, pursuing interests, and allowing happiness back in are not betrayals of love lost, they are signs of resilience. You may even find, when you are ready, that love can return in new forms. Grief changes you, but it also teaches you what endures.

---

[74] https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-grief-counseling-5189153

[75] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, "On Death and Dying", 2014

[76] Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, "Option B", 2017, 12min.com Summary

Know[3.5-19] Sadness and Depression

Sadness and depression share surface similarities;[77] both involve pain, low mood, and disruption to daily life, but they are not the same.[78] Sadness is a natural emotional response to specific events like loss, disappointment, or unmet expectations. It has a clear cause, tends to come and go, and usually eases with time or supportive action. It may affect sleep, appetite, or focus, but it does not disconnect you from your sense of self or hope for the future.

Depression, by contrast, is more than sadness, it is a pervasive, persistent state that can feel like a total loss of energy, purpose, and identity. It may not have a clear cause. Depression can include feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, guilt, or suicidal thoughts, along with physical symptoms like fatigue or changes in weight. While sadness responds to time and coping strategies, depression often requires professional treatment. Therapy, medication, or both can help restore balance and make recovery possible. If your low mood feels heavy, endless, or disconnected from any one event, reach out. You do not have to carry it alone.

Responding to Sadness and Depression

Sadness requires addressing the underlying cause and implementing coping strategies may help alleviate symptoms.[79] Depression often requires professional treatment, including therapy, medication, or a combination of both, to address the underlying neurochemical imbalances and contributing psychological factors.[80]

Responding to Sadness:

Practice RaDaR: Reflect, Describe, and Respond. (See RaDaR p. 384)
Prioritize sleep: Ensure you are getting restful, consistent sleep each night.
Eat nourishing food to support emotional stability.
Physical activity like walking, stretching, or yoga can elevate mood.
Share your feelings with a trusted friend, counselor, or support group.
Spend time outdoors: Natural light and fresh air can lift your spirits.
Express yourself through writing, art, or music.

Responding to Depression:

Seek professional therapy like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.
Work with a healthcare provider if medications are necessary.
Build a strong support network with people who can help you.
Engage in service to others to counter feelings of isolation.
Develop healthy routines to restore a sense of accomplishment.
Practice meditation and mindfulness to reduce depressive rumination.
Focus on manageable goals to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

---

[77] https://www.premierhealth.com/your-health/articles/women-wisdom-wellness-/sadness-grief-depression-what-s-the-difference-

[78] https://www.midcitytms.com/grief-vs-depression-similarities-and-differences/

[79] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-for-happiness/202302/tips-for-overcoming-sadness

[80] https://psychcentral.com/depression/depression-treatment

Know[3.5-20] Jealousy and Envy

Jealousy and envy are often confused but represent distinct emotional experiences.[81] Both arise from comparison and can evoke negative feelings, yet their focus differs: jealousy revolves around protecting what you perceive as yours, while envy centers on wanting something someone else possesses. Recognizing these differences, and their shared features, can help you better manage their effects on relationships and personal well-being.

Both jealousy and envy are poisonous to relationships, spirituality, and mental health. They erode trust, foster resentment, and pull you away from inner peace. Ancient teachings across many traditions warn against these emotions, recognizing them as powerful forces that can corrupt character, damage connection, and cloud the soul.

Similarities Between Jealousy and Envy:

Both involve emotions such as resentment, insecurity, and inadequacy.
Both can strain relationships, fostering mistrust, resentment, and conflict.
Both often emerge from comparisons that leave you feeling diminished.

Key Differences:

Jealousy involves fear of losing something you already have.
Envy involves longing for something others possess.
Jealousy is often accompanied by possessiveness, suspicion, and insecurity.
Envy is often accompanied by longing, bitterness, and resentment.
Jealousy aims to safeguard a valued relationship or status.
Envy may prompt attempts to undermine those who have what you desire.
Jealousy can lead to controlling behaviors.
Envy can result in bitterness and resentment.

Responding to Jealousy and Envy:

Jealousy:[82]

Build trust through consistent, honest actions.
Communicate fears and needs openly.
Strengthen self-esteem through personal growth.
Focus on connection, not control.
Practice self-compassion to ease insecurity.

Envy:[83]

Practice gratitude for what you have.
Develop your own strengths and goals.
Celebrate others' successes with empathy.
View envy as a signal for personal growth.
Limit unhealthy comparisons, especially online.

---

[81] https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/joy-and-pain/201401/what-is-the-difference-between-envy-and-jealousy
[82] https://relationshippp.com/how-not-to-be-jealous-in-a-relationship/
[83] https://www.calmsage.com/ways-to-stop-being-envious-of-others/

Know[3.5-21] Guilt and Shame

Both guilt and shame involve painful self-evaluation, but have different origins. Guilt arises when you know you have done something wrong. Unresolved guilt can damage self-esteem and relationships. Shame can trap you in cycles of self-rejection. It stems from the belief that you are flawed or unworthy.

While guilt and shame both involve negative self-evaluation, they are distinct emotional experiences.[84] Recognizing their similarities and differences helps you respond to each in a healthy, constructive way.

Similarities Between Guilt and Shame:

Both involve feelings of remorse, regret, and responsibility for wrongdoing.
Both can cause emotional distress and a desire for atonement.
Both lead to self-blame and impact personal relationships and self-image.

Key Differences:

> *Guilt is the belief that you DID something wrong;*
> *shame is the belief that you ARE something wrong.*
>
> --Hippie Chick, AA Member [Paraphrased]

Guilt can motivate efforts to make amends.
Shame centers on the self, with feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness.
Guilt tends to fade once wrongs are addressed, and forgiven.
Shame can persist, becoming a deep-seated belief in personal unworthiness.

Responding to Guilt and Shame:

Guilt:[85]

Acknowledge your actions honestly.
Accept responsibility without excuses.
Seek forgiveness from those you have harmed.
Make direct and sincere amends.
Reflect on lessons learned to prevent future harm.
Use therapy to process emotions and build resilience.

Shame:[86]

Practice daily self-compassion and kindness.
Challenge negative beliefs about your worth.
Separate your identity from your mistakes.
Focus on your strengths and inherent value.
Build supportive, affirming relationships.
Seek therapy to heal deep-seated feelings of unworthiness.

---

[84] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shame/201305/the-difference-between-guilt-and-shame

[85] https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/guilt/overcome

[86] https://psychcentral.com/blog/imperfect/2019/03/healing-from-emotional-abandonment-shame-and-unworthiness

Cultivating Positive Emotions

The following list explores eight positive emotions: acceptance, awe, compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, happiness, humility, and self-compassion. They form the foundation for living a good life. By working on them, a day at a time, you strengthen your well-being, relationships, and sense of purpose, leading to a life of greater dignity and grace.

Know[3.5-22] Acceptance

Acceptance bestows the gift of serenity. --TA

And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.

--Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Ed, p417

Acceptance is one of those words that is difficult to define without using the word itself. For example: "Acceptance in a mindfulness scope can be defined as accepting what happens, whether it be positive or negative."[87] While accurate, this definition is not very helpful to put it into practice.

People think of acceptance as an all or nothing process, and an unpleasant one, at that. Like eating a frog.

If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first. --Mark Twain

Fortunately, acceptance does not have to be overwhelming. You can break it down into manageable, step-by-step actions that allow you to gradually accept people, events, and situations that once felt impossible. Consider these steps:[88]

Acknowledge Your Feelings:[89] Acceptance begins with recognizing and validating your emotions without judgment. Rather than suppressing or criticizing yourself for how you feel, acknowledge your emotional experience fully. Awareness opens the path to understanding and acceptance.

Reframe Your Thoughts:[90] (See Reframing p. 309) After acknowledging your feelings, consciously shift your perspective. Move from resistance or negativity toward openness and possibility. To reframe a situation, ask :

Am I judging, or am I trying to learn?
In what ways might my perspective be limiting me?
How can I shift toward greater openness?
Can I find a more constructive interpretation?

---

[87] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acceptance#Conclusion

[88] This process was developed with the help of Pi, Personal Artificial Intelligence (2024), but double-checked for valid sources

[89] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-happiness/202108/how-practice-acceptance

[90] https://positivepsychology.com/cbt-cognitive-restructuring-cognitive-distortions/

What opportunities might exist within this experience?
How might a shift in mindset improve my well-being?

Practice Empathy:[91] Empathy is essential to acceptance. It involves seeing the world from another's perspective, acknowledging their experiences, and responding to them with compassion. Empathy does not mean you agreeor approve of another's words or behavior; it simply respects the reality of the other person's emotional world.

Look for the Positive:[92] In every situation, even painful ones, small positive elements often exist. Consciously seeking moments of goodness, however modest, can help anchor you. Focusing on these moments builds resilience, gratitude, and eventual healing.

Find Compromise and Manage Expectations:[93] Acceptance often requires adjusting your desires to align with reality. Compromising where necessary, and managing unrealistic expectations, allows you to find peace even when outcomes are disappointing or uncertain. It teaches you to meet life as it is, rather than as you wish it to be.

True acceptance includes accepting everything, even your own resistance to acceptance. (I call this "recursive acceptance".) Accept your reluctance, your procrastination, your fear, and your flaws. Acceptance does not imply approval, but instead, opening your heart to the full reality of existence. It is choosing to live fully and courageously, just as you are, in the world as it is.

Know[3.5-23] Awe

Many years ago, I took a road trip and saw the Grand Canyon for the first time. I had seen plenty of pictures, so I crossed the parking lot casually. But when I walked up to the viewing area, I gasped. For the first time, I understood that the word "breathtaking" could be a literal physical experience. What I felt was awe: a sense of something stupendous, of something vast and beautiful pulling me beyond my ordinary self.

Awe is a unique emotion that blends seemingly opposite feelings, fear and ecstasy, humility and joy.[94] It is no accident that the root "awe" gives rise to both "awesome" and "awful."[95] True awe often includes a momentary loss of self, a dissolving into something greater, leading to a deep sense of connection and transcendence. It is often linked to peak experiences and transcendence of one's current spiritual or psychological state. Awe is nearly always positive, linked to greater life satisfaction, altruism, and emotional well-being, (except in cases where it is tied to actual threats, such as natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, and so on).

---

[91] https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-be-more-empathetic-6455878

[92] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-healing-crowd/202306/how-the-positivity-effect-can-transform-your-life

[93] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-happiness/202108/how-practice-acceptance

[94] Scott Barry Kaufman, "Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization", Blinkist Summary

[95] https://www.oed.com/dictionary/awe_n1?tab=compounds_and_derived_words&partOfSpeech=adjective

The experience of awe has two parts:[96]

Perception of vastness: Encountering something larger, more powerful, or more complex than yourself.

Accommodation: Reshaping your mental framework to fit this new, expanded perception.

Vastness does not have to mean physical size. It can be meeting a person you admire, contemplating great beauty, skill, or complexity, or recognizing profound emotional moments. In simple terms: something blows your mind, and you expand to contain it. That mental and spiritual growth is what gives awe its transformative power.

For me, true awe, what I call "transcendent awe", often arises in deep human connection, fervent prayer, or contemplation of beauty and the sublime. Awe is a gateway to the spiritual life, and you can develop it intentionally. A simple process, using the acronym AWE, can help:

Attention: Focus fully on something around you. Choose to notice, without judgment, the beauty, meaning, or value in what you are experiencing. Engage your senses. It can be as small as a flower in a sidewalk crack, the sound of rain, the look in a loved one's eyes, or even the warmth of a coffee cup in your hand. Small things can open enormous doors if you pay true attention.

Wait: Once you have focused your attention, pause. Inhale naturally and allow the experience to fill you. Wait a moment in stillness. This moment of presence creates the space where awe can arise naturally.

Exhale and Expand: As you exhale, let yourself soften and open. Presence expands both inward and outward. You may feel a subtle shift—a loosening of the boundaries of the small self—and an opening toward something greater. Even a brief moment can begin to rewire your awareness and deepen your connection to life.

When you go beyond the familiar, you weaken the barriers surrounding your "tiny self," your ego. This liberation enables your true Self, your identity, to expand. Do not overthink it. Do not question whether you are doing it right. Do not expect to feel any certain thing. When you hit that sweet spot of focused attention, you will know it.

The entire process takes the length of a single breath. Developers of the technique recommend 15-20 seconds, three to five times a day.[97] But you can engage in this process as many times as you like. The more you practice, the more you will "get it". After you experience it, you will not have to remind yourself to continue the practice, or put it on your to-do list. The benefits will be obvious and you will want to continue.

---

[96] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/finding-new-home/202106/the-5-flavors-awe-and-how-taste-them

[97] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shouldstorm/202101/awe-the-instantaneous-way-feel-good-and-relieve-stress

Know[3.5-24] Compassion[98]

Compassion is not a lofty ideal; it is a practical, transformative force, rooted in how our brains are wired. Psychologist Paul Gilbert teaches that compassion begins by recognizing our shared vulnerability. Life is hard for everyone. Illness, loss, and fear visit us all eventually. This simple truth forms the foundation of genuine compassion: just like me, you want to be happy; just like me, you want to be free from suffering.

Yet compassion is not always easy. Our brains evolved with survival instincts that amplify fear, anger, and resentment. We carry an "old brain," focused on threats, and a "new brain," capable of imagination and reflection. The new brain can trap us in cycles of bitterness by replaying dangers endlessly. Negative experiences stick in our minds, while positive ones easily fade.

I lived this firsthand when my mother-in-law moved in with us. We thought she simply needed a home, a safe place to live. But she was suffering from dementia, which worsened after a fall. I had not "signed up" for this, yet I became her caregiver when my wife was at work. I was angry, frustrated, and overwhelmed. I had no idea what to do or how to be. But what touched me were the professional caretakers who visited, people whose compassion shone naturally through their actions. I realized I needed and wanted to be more like them. I began praying for compassion, not a polite prayer, but a desperate, gut-level plea to my Higher Power: "Teach me compassion."

One day, while nursing my resentment, a quiet voice inside said, "You can sit here feeling sorry for yourself, or you can get off your ass and help." That was the beginning of an inner transformation. I was not perfect, but I was better. Something in me had changed. True compassion had begun to grow, not from obligation, but from a sincere desire to care.

Compassion demands more than good feelings. It requires sensitivity to suffering and a willingness to act. It asks us to interrupt judgment by remembering our shared humanity. Developing compassion does not ignore injustice or pretend everything is fine. It means choosing a wiser path by seeing clearly, feeling deeply, and responding from strength, not fear.

In a world of uncertainty and pain, compassion becomes a revolutionary act, healing others, and healing ourselves.

Developing Compassion:[99]

Pray for compassion, honestly and sincerely, from the depths of your soul.
Admit your anger, bitterness, and helplessness, without pretending it away.
Model yourself after people who are compassionate.
Choose action over self-pity, even if it is hard.
Recall your own suffering, and realize others carry burdens you cannot see.
Ask your Higher Power daily, even hourly, for the grace to care.

---

[98] Information drawn from this article: https://www.filmsforaction.org/articles/how-to-turn-your-brain-from-anger-to-compassion/

[99] Based on my experiences.

Know[3.5-25] Forgiveness

...the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong.

--Mahatma Ghandi

Forgiveness is a deliberate and voluntary act. It involves a conscious decision to shift your emotions and attitude toward an offender, reducing the desire for retaliation or continued estrangement.[100]

There are two well-recognized forms of forgiveness:[101]

Altruistic Forgiveness: Extending compassion and understanding to the person who wronged you. You recognize their humanity and offer the chance for redemption and reconciliation.

Forgiveness for Healing: Forgiveness in this form reclaims your inner peace, frees your energy, and promotes emotional growth.

Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.

--Matthew 6:12

From my own experience, there is a third purpose for forgiveness: spiritual growth. Releasing resentment unblocks the spirit, allowing energy to flow freely. It clears space for a deeper connection with yourself, others, and the divine. Forgiveness is awakening to something greater than yourself.

[Forgive] until seventy times seven.

--Matthew 18:22

I am an angry person. I grew up angry. I cultivated it. I honed it into an art form. But I do not want to be angry anymore. Some days, it feels like endless cycles of anger, acceptance, and forgiveness. If this resonates with you, I ask you: do not give up. Do not give up on yourself, or on the peace and beauty that exists within this universe. It is worth the effort.

8 Steps to Forgiveness[102]

Recognize and accept the pain without suppressing it.
Reflect on times you were shown mercy and grace.
See the offender's humanity, even when it is difficult.
Make the conscious choice for your own peace, not theirs.
Journal, pray, meditate, or talk it through; find healthy ways to let go.
Set boundaries (if necessary), to avoid further harm to yourself.
Focus on the present and future: Let go of dwelling in the past.
Be patient with your own healing, without judgment.
Acknowledge every step forward, no matter how small.

---

[100] The American Psychological Association, "Forgiveness: A Sampling of Research Results", 2006

[101] Everett Worthington, "Five Steps to Forgiveness", 2001

[102] Compiled from: William A. Meninger, "The Process of Forgiveness", 1996; D. Patrick Miller, "A Little Book of Forgiveness", 1999; Daily Chronicle Online, "Nine Steps to Forgiveness", 2008; C. Forrest McDowell, PhD, "Peace of Heart, Peace of Mind", 2007; https://www.health.harvard.edu/ mind-and-mood/the-power-of-forgiveness

Know[3.5-26] Gratitude

Your life is shaped by your perceptions and focus.[103] What you give your attention and energy to filters every experience you have. Whether you focus on beauty, sadness, anger, fear, nobility, or pettiness, it alters you. By investing your energy in something, you assign it importance in your life.

If you want to remain mentally positive, you must shift away from negative emotions like anger and worry. Gratitude is immensely powerful, but it requires a conscious decision to focus on the blessings in your life. It begins in the mind, spreads to the heart, and eventually permeates your entire being. Over time, gratitude transforms negativity into grace, hope, joy, and peace.

Gratitude is an emotion, but it is also a skill you can practice. Just five to ten minutes of daily gratitude journaling for two to three weeks can noticeably improve your mood.[104] A few months of steady practice produces measurable benefits for your health and well-being. And why stop there?

Work on feeling grateful every day for just two weeks, and watch your life change. Here are a few ways to develop gratitude.[105] Writing them down, rather than only thinking about them, makes the practice stronger.

Write down five things you are grateful for each day.
Say "thank you," and truly mean it.
Appreciate the people who support and love you.
Write a letter of gratitude to someone who has impacted your life.
Recognize and celebrate your own strengths and talents.
Focus on positive memories that lift your spirit.
Reflect on places and spaces that bring you joy.
Appreciate the basics: clean water, food, shelter, clothing.
Imagine how life would feel without the things you now cherish.

A Personal Note About Gratitude

Gratitude practice is common in recovery and therapy because it is life-changing. But like anything repeated without reflection, it can grow stale, especially in relation to external, transient things. Be grateful for relationships, health, food, and shelter, but recognize that these blessings are gifts of *this* day, not permanent possessions. Gratitude is rooted in the present, not projected into the future. Expectations are not gratitude; they are a setup for disappointment and resentment.

Gratitude is best when it is immediate and real. When I seek gratitude, I just look and listen, wherever I am. Then I mentally point to something, however small, and pray, "Thank you for that," or "I am grateful for this." It becomes a living experience, not a mental exercise. Later, I write it down to fix it in my memory, building a treasury of blessings that no loss can take away.

---

[103] Debra Waisner, "Gratitude & Appreciation: 7 Steps to a Happier Life"
[104] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mindful-self-express/201511/how-gratitude-leads-happier-life
[105] Steve Handel, "Gratitude Workbook"

Know[3.5-27] Happiness

True happiness is found not in the pursuit of pleasure or the avoidance of pain, but in the cultivation of inner virtue and tranquility of mind. --Epictetus [paraphrased]

People desperately want to know how to be happy. And while we pay lip service to those profound truths that leads to happiness, the mind responds, "Yeah, but... if I had more money... if I could fall in love... if I had a better job... then I could be happy!" And so it goes, always chasing, never arriving.

Happiness is misunderstood, clouded by myths and cultural conditioning. One common myth is that happiness depends on external circumstances, wealth, success, possessions. The idea that happiness appears once some external criteria is met has been debunked again and again. Many who seem to have everything they want still struggle deeply.

*Nobody's that f*cking happy all the damn time!*

--Heather, AA Member

Another myth is that happiness is a permanent state, something achievable by getting what we want and avoiding what we do not. This ignores the truth that emotions are transient, and life is always changing. Focusing only on goals leads to superficial, fleeting satisfaction, and often, disappointment.

True happiness transcends these illusions. It is not a fleeting emotion tied to external events, but a deeper sense of contentment and meaning. It results from living with purpose, building meaningful connections, and aligning your life with your values. Happiness is not the goal. Happiness is the by-product of living a good life.

Some Facts About Happiness

Three questions determine 99% of your happiness:[106]
What am I working on and why?
Who am I spending time with and why?
How well am I treating my body and why?

Genetics play a role in your capacity for happiness. 50% to 80% of your happiness is influenced by your genes.[107] The rest is shaped by factors you can influence, such as your activities, habits, and choices.

Hedonic adaptation means you naturally adjust to positive changes.[108] A new car, a new job, a romance, all eventually seem normal. Happiness comes not from chasing events, but by living a meaningful life.

---

[106] https://markmanson.net/breakthrough/033-3-questions-that-determine-your-happiness
[107] Jonathan Haidt, "The Happiness Hypothesis", 2006
[108] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedonic_treadmill

You are terrible at predicting your own future happiness.[109] Studies show people consistently misjudge what will make them happy. External achievements rarely deliver lasting fulfillment.

Happiness and Contentment[110]

I recently had a realization that changed how I think about happiness. The most important thing in life is not to be happy. It is to do the right thing. Happiness may come and go, rising and falling like the tide. But living with virtue, by choosing integrity, kindness, and truth, creates a life that matters. You will never be happy every single moment. Doing the right thing builds something far deeper than happiness, which then makes space for it. Happiness is a result of living well and making the world better.

Happiness, properly understood, is not simply a feeling of satisfaction or contentment. True happiness is an objective[111] condition: it is the result of living a good life, one directed by reason, virtue, and moral excellence. Contentment can come and go based on circumstances or moods. Happiness, by contrast, reflects the long-term fulfillment of human potential.

To achieve true happiness, you must live rightly. This requires developing the faculties of reason, acting with integrity, cultivating virtues like courage, justice, and generosity, and striving to become the best version of yourself. Happiness is not something that can be pursued directly through pleasure, success, or emotional satisfaction. It is the natural consequence of living a life that is directed toward the good.

Building happiness begins with clear moral purpose. It is creating habits of virtue through daily choices, aligning goals with ideals, and treating others with kindness, and respect. It requires ongoing reflection, the courage to admit your faults, and the perseverance to grow through adversity.

In the classical sense, happiness is not achieved through some fantasized, perfect emotional state. It results from becoming a good person and living a meaningful life. It is the reward of a soul that strives for excellence and lives in harmony with what is true, right, and noble. It simply means that you do your best, every day, to live well and make the world better.

These are the habits that lead to real, lasting happiness:

Choose virtue over momentary pleasure.
Align your daily actions with your highest values.
Practice honesty, kindness, fairness, and courage every day.
Reflect on your faults and take responsibility without excuses.
Focus on becoming a better person, not just feeling better.
Treat relationships as sacred opportunities for goodness.
Set goals that serve both your growth and the greater good.
Embrace hard work and discipline as the foundation of character.

---

[109] https://www.hope-wellness.com/blog/how-well-can-you-predict-what-will-make-you-happy

[110] These concepts are drawn from "Ten Philosophical Mistakes", Mortimer J. Adler, 1985, "Chapter 6: Happiness and Contentment"

[111] "Objective" here refers to a condition grounded in external reality and moral structure, regardless of one's emotional state.

Accept that emotional highs and low are normal.
Stay committed to living a good life, one day at a time.
Live today in a way that you will respect tomorrow.
Be grateful for the life you have; work toward the life you dream of.

Know[3.5-28] Humility

Humility is the quality of being modest and respectful toward yourself and others. Humble individuals are open to learning from others, willing to acknowledge their flaws, and quick to appreciate the contributions of those around them.[112] They have no need to boast, compete, or seek attention. Humility gives you a balanced view of yourself in relation to the world. It strengthens empathy and connection.

You might associate humility with religious submission or meekness, but true humility is a mindset of clarity and openness. It encourages you to drop your defenses and engage with the world honestly. A humble person sees reality more accurately and interacts with others more authentically.

Once you understand humility, the world around you blossoms like a new flower of reality. Your ego becomes healthier and many of the walls in your mind come down. The energy you used to support all those defenses becomes available to you again.

Unlike other virtues, humility cannot be developed by conventional means. Imagine enrolling in a course on humility, competing for the highest grade, and proudly framing your certificate of completion. True humility requires a hands-on, experiential journey. Here are some paths that lead there:

The Twelve Steps: Humility forms the foundation of the Twelve Step program.[113] Working the Steps requires acknowledging your shortcomings, surrendering to a Higher Power, setting aside pride and ego, and taking full responsibility for your actions.

Experiencing Awe: Awe expands your perspective, reminding you of your smallness in the vast complexity of existence. Standing before something greater than yourself creates a sense of reverence, interconnectedness, and sincere humility.

Practicing Empathy: Actively listening to others' stories, both their hardships and triumphs, broadens your perspective. Deep, genuine empathy humbles you by revealing the rich inner worlds of those around you.

Acts of Service: Service pulls you out of self-centeredness. Volunteering your time and effort to help others highlights the struggles and dignity of fellow human beings and reminds you of your role within a larger community.

Prayer and Meditation: Regular prayer and meditation build humility through introspection. Acknowledging your imperfections, seeking guidance, observing your thoughts without judgment, and accepting the present moment foster deeper self-awareness and a softened heart.

---

[112] Edward D. Hess, "Humility is the New Smart", 2017, Blinkist.com summary

[113] AA World Services, "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions", p70

Know[3.5-29] Self-Compassion[114]

Self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem. Self-esteem relies on being better, doing well, or gaining approval, and when we fall short, it crashes. It can make us defensive, reactive, or overly focused on appearances. In contrast, self-compassion does not depend on success or comparison. It offers a steady, caring way of relating to ourselves, especially when we struggle, and creates real emotional stability and strength.

Self-compassion is often misunderstood. Some think it is a sign of self-pity, weakness, or laziness, but research proves otherwise. Self-compassion reduces self-focus, enhances resilience, and leads to healthier behaviors. It does not mean giving yourself a pass or avoiding responsibility; it means treating yourself with the same support you would offer to someone you care about.

While self-criticism tries to motivate through fear and shame, it often backfires, creating anxiety, avoidance, and burnout. Self-compassion is just as committed to high standards, but it builds confidence instead of tearing it down. Encouragement, not punishment, is what helps us learn, grow, and keep going after setbacks.

By dialing down your self-criticism, you can usually dial up your self-compassion. Realistic assessment is always better than harsh self-judgment. Seeing yourself compassionately gives you a more accurate picture of reality. Here are a few tips to help you with this:

Pause and notice when your inner voice turns harsh. Name it without judgment: "That is self-criticism talking." Then, let it go.

Ask yourself, "Would I say this to a friend?" If not, rephrase it gently and supportively. You deserve the same compassion you show others.

Practice speaking to yourself with a kind, steady tone, especially after mistakes or failures. Progress matters more than perfection.

Remind yourself that suffering and imperfection are part of being human. You are not alone. Everyone has highs and lows.

Swap judgment for curiosity. Instead of "What’s wrong with me?" ask "What do I need right now?" Focus on self-support, not self-condemnation.

Use grounding phrases in hard moments, like: "This is a moment of struggle. Struggle is part of life. I can be kind to myself." Be honest and sincere.

Reflect on how self-compassionate support could help you try again, rather than shut down. Resist melting into self-pity or harsh criticism.

Visualize your compassionate self, or someone who loves you deeply, and borrow their voice when yours turns against you.

Build daily check-ins: "How am I doing? What do I need? How can I show myself kindness today?" This is not self-indulgent; it is practical.

---

[114] Basic concepts from: Steven Hickman, PsyD, "Self-Compassion for Dummies", 2021

Emotional Regulation Tools

While specific emotions may require different strategies to manage and heal, there are many methods and techniques that are common to living a healthy emotional life. Some of these are listed here:

Know[3.5-30] Prayer[115]

I pray that I may be taught how to pray. I pray that I may be linked through prayer to the mind and will of God.

--Hazeldon Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", 31 May

Prayer can be a powerful tool for emotional regulation. Research shows that individuals who pray for help during difficult times score significantly higher in emotional management, self-worth, and perspective. Prayer can soften painful emotions, lift feelings of hopelessness, and ease deep resentment.

In my own experience, prayer changed me when I was desperate for change. It helped me find compassion when I had none, and lifted burdens I thought I would carry forever. When I talk about prayer, I do not use soft language. I tell people, "Pray your ass off. Pray like your life depends on it, because it does." Prayer is not something you add to life; it is something you live.

But prayer alone is not enough. Relying solely on prayer without taking action can delay necessary change. Pray for wisdom, strength, and courage, then act. Practical solutions and real work must follow heartfelt prayer.

Know[3.5-31] The Cognitive Triangle[116]

The Cognitive Triangle, also called the CBT Triangle, is a foundational concept in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. It shows the constant interaction between your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Imagine a triangle: thoughts at the top, feelings on one corner, behaviors on the other. Your thoughts influence your feelings, your feelings influence your actions, and your actions influence both thoughts and feelings in return.

By stepping in at any point, changing a thought, shifting a feeling, or choosing a different behavior, you can break a negative cycle and move toward positive change. You cannot control an emotion once it appears, but you can influence what you think and what you do next.

Know[3.5-32] Accept Your Emotions[117]

You cannot control which emotions arise, but you can control how you respond. Acceptance begins with awareness: pause, notice what you are feeling, and make space for it without judgment. From there, you can choose your thoughts and actions more deliberately, and those choices will shape how the emotion unfolds.

---

[115] https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/12/101214085328.htm

[116] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_behavioral_therapy#/media/File:Cognitive_behavioral_ therapy_-_basic_tenets.svg

[117] Dr. David Beales, Helen Whitton, "Emotional Healing for Dummies", p49-50

Know[3.5-33] Do Not Judge Your Emotions[118]

Judging your emotions as negative often makes them harder to bear. Secondary feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, or anger about your initial emotions can intensify distress. It is often the second wave of emotion that causes the real suffering.

To stop judging your emotions, simply notice them. Pay attention to where you feel it in your body without labeling it as good or bad. Notice the thoughts and associations that arise alongside it. Acknowledge your thoughts without needing to judge or fix them. Let go of what you "should" feel, and experience the emotion as it is. If you catch yourself judging, do not scold yourself, just notice that, too, and gently return to observing.

Know[3.5-34] Know Your Emotional Triggers

Understanding your emotional triggers is essential for managing your reactions. Triggers are situations, memories, or thoughts that set off emotional responses, often without warning. They can be external events or internal associations linked to past trauma.[119] When something in the present echoes an old wound, your brain reacts as if you are under threat, reigniting feelings like fear, anger, or helplessness.[120]

Common triggers include threats to self-esteem, pride, security, ambitions, personal relationships, control, finances, and healthy intimacy. Emotions are complex: anger can mask hurt or fear, and disproportionate reactions often point to deeper unresolved pain. You can even feel emotions about emotions, such as shame over anger or sadness about sadness.

To identify your triggers, keep detailed notes, not just casual thoughts. Track what happened, who was involved, what emotion arose, and its intensity. Patterns will emerge, giving you a clearer baseline for understanding yourself.

Handling triggers requires flexibility. Anger often needs a pause and deep breath; fear benefits from gradual exposure;[121] sadness can be eased by reaching out to others. Avoid chronic anger triggers when possible, confront fear thoughtfully to build resilience, and minimize avoidable sources of sadness. Treat yourself like a scientist or detective, refine what works and discard what does not.

Triggers connected to past trauma require special care. Self-compassion and understanding are key to healing. Accept that triggers are part of being human, no matter how much you grow, new experiences will create new emotional challenges. Your emotions are not your enemy. They are part of your living experience. Let them flow in, and let them flow out. You are not your emotions; you are the one who experiences them.

---

[118] Beverly Engall, "Healing Your Emotional Self", 2006, p148-149

[119] Robert Gepka, "Managing Depression with Mindfulness for Dummies", p77

[120] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLj3FSd79i4&ab_channel=TheSchoolofLife

[121] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-other-side/201902/the-resilience-paradox-why-we-often-get-resilience-wrong

Know[3.5-35] Reframing

Reframing is the practice of consciously shifting how you perceive a situation.[122] It is used in various therapeutic approaches, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy[123] and Neuro-Linguistic Programming,[124] and is especially effective for emotional regulation. Thoughts and emotions are tightly linked; changing how you think about a thing changes how you feel about it.

There are three core ideas behind reframing.[125] First, events themselves have no inherent meaning; they become positive or negative based on how you interpret them. This does not deny the reality of pain or hardship, but reminds you that your perception holds power. Second, every situation is filtered through a frame of unconscious assumptions, the beliefs you bring into it. These hidden narratives often shape your emotions and reactions. Third, behind every negative frame is a positive intention, even if it is distorted. Your inner voice, even when critical, is often trying to protect you from pain or disappointment.

To reframe a situation, begin by identifying what happened and how you initially reacted. What thoughts or beliefs came up? Are they accurate, or are they shaped by bias or fear? Try to see the situation from other perspectives. Ask yourself: What are the facts? What assumptions am I making? What might someone else see here that I do not?

Then, search for a healthier or more empowering frame. Look for possible growth, hidden value, or long-term meaning. Replace rigid or negative language with more balanced words, not "I failed," but "I hit a setback." Explore worst-case fears: are they as severe as they feel? Visualize success and take a wider view: "Will this matter in a year?"

Finally, reinforce the new frame with compassion and action. Treat yourself kindly, like a friend. Practice gratitude where possible. Take steps forward based on this new outlook, and keep practicing. Reframing is not a onetime fix; it is a learned skill. The more you use it, the more natural it becomes.

Know[3.5-36] Set Clear Boundaries[126]

Establish clear boundaries in your relationships. Communicate your limits and expectations to others, preventing resentment and unwanted obligations. You can be firm without being harsh. Nor do you have to announce your boundaries in a list, suddenly, out of the blue. Simply state them clearly, without apology or qualification, as necessary.

---

[122] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_reframing

[123] Steven Handel, "The Science of Self-Improvement", 2012

[124] Richard Bandler and John Grinder, "Reframing, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and the Transformation of Meaning", 1982

[125] No longer available: http://feelhappiness.com/category/beliefs/, A Practical Guide To Reframing Your Thoughts And Making Yourself Happier, Oct 2012

[126] https://corporatecommunicationexperts.com.au/how-to-stop-being-passive-aggressive

Know[3.5-37] Non-attachment[127]

Non-attachment, also called non-identification, is the practice of stepping back from your emotions instead of being swept away by them. You can feel emotions fully without letting them define you or drive your behavior. It may feel strange at first, but with practice, it becomes almost magical. Emotions begin to move through you rather than control you. You pause, breathe, and remember: "This feeling is temporary."

Practicing non-attachment helps you become more resilient and centered. It doesn't mean shutting down or becoming indifferent, it means loosening your grip on expectations, outcomes, and identity. You find freedom not by avoiding emotion, but by refusing to let them run your life. Here are a few key principles to guide your practice:

Observe your thoughts and emotions with detachment. Notice where you are outsourcing your happiness to things, outcomes, or other people.

Stop seeking happiness externally. Contentment grows from within, not from controlling what happens around you.

Let go of the urge to control everything. Life unfolds in ways we cannot predict. Fighting that only increases suffering.

Remember the transience of all things. Emotions rise and fall. You can experience them without clinging or resisting.

Non-attachment creates space, space to feel, to reflect, and to choose. And in that space, you will find calm, strength, and freedom.

Know[3.5-38] Prepare for Difficult Emotions[128]

Difficult situations are inevitable, personal conflicts, family tensions, career setbacks, or emotional turbulence. But many of these challenges can be anticipated. By mentally preparing in advance, you increase your chances of staying emotionally balanced when the moment arrives.

Know[3.5-39] Put Your Ego on a Shelf[129]

Imagine placing your self-esteem and emotional reactions on a metaphorical shelf, out of immediate reach (by you or anyone else). In doing so, you create a mental space where you can experience your emotions without allowing them to disrupt your inner equilibrium. This simple mental practice promotes emotional stability, allowing you to experience life's highs and lows with greater composure and clarity.

Know[3.5-40] Professional Help

If you are struggling, you do not have to go it alone. There are people trained to walk with you through the darkest parts of the path, and if you let them in, they might help you find your way home.

---

[127] https://mindfulled.com/non-attachment/

[128] Dr. David Beales, Helen Whitton, "Emotional Healing for Dummies", p276

[129] Laura L. Smith, PhD, "Anger Management for Dummies 3rd Ed", p102

Know[3.5-41] **RaDaR: Reflect, Describe, Respond**

If RULER is the workshop where you learn to understand, express, and regulate your emotions. RaDaR is the portable toolbox you take with you for when you need it. (See pages 116, 218, 260, 306, 384, 447, 788)

RaDaR is a simple, powerful tool I created to navigate emotional moments with clarity and intention. It stands for Reflect, Describe, Respond, three deliberate steps that create space between what you feel and what you do. It is not a tool to control your emotions. It helps you relate to them with awareness, so you can choose your response instead of reacting on autopilot.

Reflect on your current situation, both internally and externally. Take a moment to pause and pay close attention to what is happening around you and within you. What event just occurred? Who was involved? What was said? What are you thinking right now? And how are you feeling in response? This is not analysis or judgment; it is an act of observation. Notice your physical state, your tone of voice, your body language. Are you tense, shaky, withdrawn? What's your emotional state, anger, fear, guilt, sadness, defensiveness, shame? Is this feeling familiar, or does it surprise you? Reflection helps you slow down long enough to catch the full picture, not just the trigger, but your whole reaction to it. You cannot change what you are unwilling to face, and this step helps bring the unconscious into view.

Describe what you are experiencing, clearly and honestly. This means putting words to both your emotions and your thoughts. Label the feeling: "I feel angry," "I feel rejected," "I feel hurt," "I feel afraid." Be as specific as you can. The more precise your description, the more insight you gain. You might also describe any physical sensations you are feeling, such as tightness in your chest, heat in your face, or heaviness in your limbs. Describe your thoughts too, are they racing, looping, blaming, catastrophizing? This is not a time for storytelling or self-justification. Just say what is true. You are not explaining or analyzing, you are naming. The act of describing puts distance between you and the emotion. It helps you step out of the flood and stand on solid ground. When you name something, you contain it. You shrink the chaos down to something you can hold, and then decide what to do with it.

Respond in a way that reflects your values and the will of your Higher Power. Ask yourself: What kind of person do I want to be in this moment? What action is aligned with the principles I believe in? What might my Higher Power want for me here, not just what I feel like doing, but what I know is right and good? This is where choice lives. You may still feel the emotion, but now can choose your next step wisely. That might mean speaking calmly, stepping away, making amends, setting a boundary, or saying nothing at all.

A skillful response is not always dramatic. Often, it is subtle, a deep breath instead of a frown, a soft answer instead of a harsh shout, a pause instead of a push. The key is intention. You are no longer driven by impulse or pain. You are choosing to act from a centered place, in alignment with your deeper self. This is how emotional regulation becomes spiritual practice: not just managing emotions, but responding with integrity, presence, and grace.

3.6 Spirit

We claim spiritual progress, rather than spiritual perfection.

--Alcoholics Anonymous, p60

Whatever you think about the most, that is your Higher Power.

--Arthur, AA Member

Spirit Contents

1. About Spirit 385
2. Truths About Spirit 385
3. Spiritual Self-Assessment 387
4. Finding Your Higher Power 388
5. Spiritual Practice 389
6. Other Spiritual Issues 416
7. Spirit Conclusion 424

About Spirit

Your spirit is a vital component of your whole self. It requires attention and care, in the same manner as your mind and body. "Spirit" is a simple word with a complex meaning and layered history.[1] You have an intuitive understanding of what it means. But like other ethereal concepts in a material age, it has been rendered colorless and flat, not the living presence within and around you that, in reality, it is.

I invite you to rediscover your spirit, not as a belief, label, or idea, but as something immediate and alive. I am reminding you of what you already know. You are more, much more, than that everyday someone who wakes up, goes to work, pays the bills, and does the laundry. Within you burns a spark of Divinity. You are part of something beautiful and good, sacred and pure, more than flesh and thought. That spark within you is spirit.

Know[3.6-01] **Truths About Spirit**

1. You exist between the very large and the very small, the distant past and the unknown future. Yet you choose to live in a way that binds your conscious experience to the narrow band called everyday life. How mundane and numbing life becomes in your comfort zone. How frustrating and disappointing, to never look outside or more deeply within the tiny realm of your personal affairs. But it is your choice: how you live and what you do with what you have. You are the universe, and it is you.

---

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirit

2. An ancient Zen saying goes, “Name the colors, blind the eye.” Your mind tends to label, compare, and categorize. For practical reasons, this is useful. But this same habit causes you to see the world through filters of words, concepts, and categories. The undivided whole of reality is chopped into fragments, symbolized and sorted. The beautiful, flowing experience of existence is shattered into mental pieces, weighed down by associations and filtered through memories and expectations.

3. Beneath all things, your cells, the stars, are waves of probability. The solid world is a statistical illusion, as fleeting as the sigh of a sleeping child. Yet the vastness of the universe is real. The miraculous complexity of life is real. The infinite order of the physical world is real. All you have to do is open your eyes to see, your ears to hear, and your awareness to know it.

4. Try to define "I" and you will end up listing externals: name, address, occupation, traits. These describe you, but they are not the stream of consciousness you call "I." The word "I" is just a word. It functions like "table," a symbol to refer to something real. But unlike a table, "I" does not refer to an object. It points to a mystery: your awareness itself.

5. Life is complete when it ends. Whether things are done or undone, wanted or missed, it is complete. Each life begins. Each life ends. Each life is whole. You think life is incomplete when you crave something you lack. But when your heart is at peace, you will know: your life is already complete.

6. Time does not exist. It is a brilliant illusion. There is no past or future, only this moment. We believe in time because we perceive change. A clock does not measure time; it only marks its own internal shifts. Memories are not the past. Daydreams are not the future. These are constructs. Time is a tool. Use it when needed, then set it down. Do not dwell in places that do not exist. Only in presence are you truly free.

7. Your path is always there. You can find it woven through your thoughts, your feelings, your struggles, and your stillness. It is in every state of being. All you must do is look.

8. You are made of layers. Each one is a patchwork of needs, drives, fears, and beliefs. The rare moments when you are lucid, open, and free, cherish them. To rely on your Higher Power is to shift your locus of control upward to something wiser. A spiritual entity or higher self that can see farther, choose better, and help you become who you are meant to be.

9. Breath is the bridge between being and nonbeing. It is the edge of will and inevitability. You share it with every living thing since the dawn of life. Awareness of breath is the foundation of spiritual practice, the nexus point between spirit and body. To breathe consciously is to move one step closer to God. With each breath, you participate in the mystery of existence.

10. The most important act of your life is this, always this: seek your Higher Power actively, immediately, constantly, fervently, and sincerely, in this moment. Not someday. Not tomorrow. Not later. Find, connect, and reconnect here and now. With every breath. Every moment. Every day.

Know[3.6-02] **Spiritual Self-Assessment**[2]

The following statements are for consideration of your spiritual condition. They are not definitive descriptions of a "spiritual" person. Some agreement with them may indicate you are on a spiritual path. They may also provide insight and guidance on how to live a spiritual life.

1. I practice self-care. I eat well and sleep well. I exercise, stretch, and play regularly. I avoid addictive substances and activities.

2. I tell the truth to myself and others. I work on knowing and telling the truth. My ability to know and speak the truth expands as I learn and develop. I experience freedom to be more of myself when I tell the truth.

3. I pray and meditate. I practice mindfulness, meditation, or prayer daily. This practice continues through my day. Wisdom and spiritual guidance come to me in my mindful receptivity. My inner wisdom leads me to joy.

4. I allow myself to experience the emotional pain of the human condition. Rather than avoiding, denying, or medicating, I allow myself to feel all my feelings. I use my emotional reactions to inform me of where I need healing.

5. I am open to learning. I am losing interest in making judgments and I am gaining zest for my experience of childlike curiosity. My experiences are opportunities to learn. I am open to learning about other spiritual traditions.

6. I experience oneness, rather than separation. I am part of the fabric of all beings and I respect others. I may experience aloneness, but not loneliness.

7. I generously share my abundance of time, talent, and money. I am a contributor and a resource for others because I value and enjoy giving of myself. Giving increases my abundance rather than depleting it.

8. I am grateful. I count my blessings. I give thanks each day. Even when I experience pain, I seek and find meaning and substance in it.

9. I participate in a spiritual or loving community of family and/or friends; a group who relate to each other in a loving and/or spiritual way.

10. I enjoy what I do. I do not need to exert much effort at managing my time. Rather, I experience maximum enjoyment from all things.

11. I am aware of my life-mission. My presence on the planet has a purpose, and I can describe my purpose.

12. My history is not my destiny. I experience my Self as inherently spiritual. I develop all my attributes and use them in the appropriate time and place.

---

[2] I adapted this self-assessment from a version originally written by Marty Crouch in 1996. After reviewing several tools, I chose this one because it felt more personal and less clinical. Although it is copyrighted, the original document states: "This assessment is intended to be used and shared." The website it once appeared on is no longer active, but a memorial page about the author can be found at www.martycrouch.com. The original document was available for download in November 2020 at rolfsresources.com/Spiritual_Self_Assessment.doc. I have made minor edits for clarity and brevity, including modifying item nine to refer to a "loving/spiritual group" rather than a "religious organization."

Know[3.6-03] **Finding Your Higher Power: A Practical Exercise**[3]

This is a simple but illuminating practice that can take as little as 30 minutes, or as long as you need. All you need is a pen, a few sheets of paper, honesty, and a little (or maybe a lot of) courage.

Page 1: All About God

On the first sheet of paper, write the words "All About God" at the top. Then begin writing freely, whatever comes to mind when you think of God. Write the beliefs you were taught, the things you have heard, and the things you feel. You may find yourself writing what you think you are supposed to write: that God is good, God loves you, you love God. That is perfectly fine.

But stay with it a little longer. Go deeper.

Many people discover something unexpected when they go beyond what they "should" feel. They begin to notice anger, confusion, or sadness. Why does God allow war? Why do children suffer? Why do people die in pain or live in despair? These are real questions. They do not mean you lack faith. They mean you are paying attention.

Let the questions come. Let the feelings rise. Do not edit or judge them. This is about truth, not performance. You are not writing a theology paper. You are clearing space in your soul.

Page 2: All About My Higher Power

Now, take a fresh sheet of paper and write "All About My Higher Power" at the top. This is where things get personal. Imagine what a spiritual presence would be like if it were real, and kind, and cared about you. Not a system or sermon, but a living presence.

Could you talk to it? Would it listen? Understand? Forgive? Could it guide you? Could it help you become more loving, more whole, more real?

What does this Higher Power feel like to you? Is it masculine, feminine, both, or neither? Does it have a form? Or is it a feeling? A whisper in your gut? A light behind your eyes? A sense of peace or a flow of grace?

Describe it as clearly and fully as you can. Imagine how it moves in your life. How it shows up. How you speak to it. How it responds. If it feels distant, write that too. You are building relationship, not doctrine.

Stay Open and Revisit Often

Your conception of a Higher Power evolves as you change. That is not a failure of faith. It is a living spirituality that grows with you. As you grow, your connection deepens and becomes richer, more honest, more alive. Revisit this exercise from time to time, or whenever you feel distant, confused, lost, or curious. Do it as thoroughly and as often as you like. Keep these pages. They are the footprints you leave on your path to understanding your Higher Power, and the beginning of your new spiritual life.

---

3 Adapted from a description by Stephanie, AA Member

Spiritual Practice

Introduction

Spiritual practice is your pathway to explore the rich landscape of inner work and connection. You will discover tools, reflections, and techniques that deepen your relationship with your Higher Power and strengthen your spirit in daily life. You do not need to be an expert, a mystic, a guru, or a religious devotee to benefit from these practices. They are for anyone and everyone, ordinary people walking the path of growth and transformation.

This section is divided into clear, stand-alone segments. You can read it straight through or explore individual concepts as needed. Whether you come here for study, reflection, or specific tools, you are free to move at your own pace. Above all, this is a practical, honest guide, drawn from research and experience, not abstract theory. Use it as a companion on your journey. Return to it as often as you like.

Why Prayer and Meditation Matter

In a world that often feels loud, busy, and divided, there is a growing hunger for something deeper.[4] Even in a secular age, people are drawn toward spirituality, not as dogma, but as a way to reconnect with what is meaningful, enduring, and real.

Across centuries and cultures, human beings have sought something beyond themselves: a connection to the sacred, a sense of belonging in the universe, an answer to life's deepest questions. The longing for spiritual connection has not disappeared, it has only changed its shape.

Prayer and meditation meet that longing. They strengthen the spirit, center the mind, and bring you into alignment with your Higher Power. These are not mysterious or exclusive practices. They are available to you right now, in the middle of your ordinary life.

You do not need to retreat to a monastery, study ancient texts, or master complex rituals. Prayer and meditation are as natural as breathing, as immediate as closing your eyes, as profound as reaching inward with honesty and intention. They do not push you to achieve perfection or find enlightenment. They are simply practices that strengthen the sacred relationship between you and the Divine.

Know[3.6-04] Purpose and Benefits

Prayer and meditation offer far more than personal comfort or stress relief. They open a doorway to a deeper, richer experience of life itself. The true purpose of these practices is to strengthen your spirit, develop awareness of your Higher Power, and align your life with something greater than your own will. Prayer does not change God; prayer changes you.

---

[4] From Google Books NGram Viewer: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=prayer%2C+meditation&year_start=1979&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cprayer%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cmeditation%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2Cprayer%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cmeditation%3B%2Cc0

Meditation is not an escape from reality; it is a return to reality in its fullest, most sacred form. Together, prayer and meditation form what I call "Inner Focus", a blended practice that moves across a wide spectrum of consciousness.[5] Just as "yellow" and "ultraviolet" are points on a light spectrum, your mental and spiritual states exist along a spectrum of mental states that includes waking state, prayer, meditation, hypnosis, dreaming, alertness, flow state, and more.[6]

Do not assume that your normal waking state is the most effective,[7] normal,[8] or even the real "you."[9] There is a universe inside your head,[10] and spiritual practice helps you explore and enrich it.

The purpose of prayer, in archaic terms, is "…the communion of the soul with GOD…" and "…union with the life of GOD in identity of purpose with His will."[11] In spiritual terms, it is to develop awareness of a cosmic consciousness[12] and to live the true purpose of your existence. Prayer does not change God. Prayer changes you.

I prayed… I prayed so hard… --Jessica, AA Member

Likewise, despite the prevalence of self-centered benefits attributed to it, the definition of meditation is "to engage in mental exercise… for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness."[13] Like prayer, you can engage in meditation for personal utilitarian benefits, but the true purpose is much more profound.

Through Inner Focus, you will experience many mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual benefits. These may include:[14]

Reduced anxiety, stress, and emotional reactivity.
Increased calm, focus, and emotional balance.
Improved health, blood pressure, and immune function.
Greater empathy, forgiveness, and connection to others.
A deeper sense of purpose, peace, and resilience

The benefits are real, but they are by-products of fundamental and natural processes. The heart of spiritual practice is not measured in outcomes; it is the quiet return to presence, honesty, and the authentic you. There are many forms of prayer and meditation, but starting with these practices gives you a strong foundation to explore further.

---

[5] Ken Wilbur, "The Spectrum of Consciousness", 1977

[6] An interesting take on how consciousness relates to "primary reality" is found in: John F. Schumaker, "The Corruption of Reality", 1995

[7] Daniel Kahneman, "Thinking, Fast and Slow", 2011

[8] Martha Stout, "The Myth of Sanity", 2002

[9] Thomas Metzinger, "The Ego Tunnel ", 2010

[10] https://www.sciencealert.com/wildly-fun-new-paper-compares-the-human-brain-to-the-structure-of-the-universe

[11] A.E.J. Rawlinson, "Religious Reality", 1918

[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_Consciousness

[13] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meditate

[14] Meditation: Meditation for Dummies 2nd Edition, Stephan Bodian, 2006; Prayer: https://www.healthfitnessrevolution.com/top-10-health-benefits-praying/, https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/17/health/benefits-of-prayer-wellness/index.html

Know[3.6-05] Negative Aspects of Prayer and Meditation

I would be remiss not to mention reported negative effects when prayer and meditation are misunderstood or misused. While some accounts are anecdotal, others are supported by research:

Misplaced expectations: treating prayer as a magic wish machine or meditation as emotional anesthesia often leads to disappointment. Prayer and meditation are not quick fixes for life's problems.[15]

Avoiding necessary change: using prayer or meditation to tolerate bad situations (like a toxic job or unhealthy relationship) can delay the better choice - to change your circumstances.[16]

Substituting for deeper needs: grief, anger, and negative emotions may be mitigated through spiritual practice, especially when paired with professional help, but unhealthy spiritual habits can also suppress or bury them.[17]

Spiritual superiority: using prayer or meditation with mistaken intent can inflate your sense of being "above" others, quietly feeding ego rather than humility.[18]

Emotional or identity shifts: some studies report that meditation can cause negative emotions (panic, anxiety, depression), shift your sense of self and relationships, or create a feeling of passivity or loss of motivation.[19] Approach your spiritual practice with openness and care.

While some negative effects have been reported, not all discomfort is a signal of harm. Spiritual practice can stir up difficult emotions or prompt life changes, but these are often part of genuine personal growth, not signs of failure. And it is sometimes difficult to determine which is true. You may need time, reflection, or outside guidance to tell the difference.

For example, realizing you are in an unhealthy relationship and leaving it may feel disruptive, but it reflects positive change. Resting after years of relentless overwork may look like "loss of motivation," but it is a step toward balance. Becoming less reactive or angry may seem like passivity to others, but it is often a sign of deepening peace.

The key is to stay discerning: discomfort alone does not mean something is wrong, but persistent distress, confusion, or emotional overload deserves careful attention. Prayer and meditation are tools to help you face truth, not escape it. If you are unsure, seek professional help.

---

15 https://thehumanist.com/magazine/september-october-2007/features/can-meditation-be-bad-for-you

16 https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jan/23/is-mindfulness-making-us-ill : "Rather than removing the source of stress, whether that's unfeasible workloads, poor management or low morale, some employers encourage their staff to meditate: a quick fix that's much cheaper, at least in the short term."

17 Stephan Bodian, "Meditation for Dummies 2nd Edition", 2006, p206

18 See Proverbs 30:12 and Matthew 6:6

19 https://www.insider.com/why-meditation-can-be-bad-2018-3#4-you-might-re-live-negative-memories-and-emotions-4

Preparing for Prayer and Meditation

If your ego desires to meditate, it will never be right. If your soul desires to meditate, it will always be right. If you have to ask, it is your ego. --TA

The first lesson of prayer and meditation is that few people are inclined to formal practice. Prayer and meditation are natural, but formal practice, less so. You may not want to sit quietly for 10 or 20 minutes with your eyes closed or bow your head with folded hands. Nor do you have to. You can pray and meditate how you choose in a way that is conducive to your spirituality.

You may be in a situation where you face ridicule if you begin prayer and meditation openly. The good news is that you can pray and meditate privately, with no one the wiser. You can engage in prayer and meditation in a crowd, waiting to check out at the supermarket, or taking a minute at work.[20] (Do not attempt this while driving or operating equipment.) Adapt your practice to your circumstances. You can mix your techniques or change them any time. Prayer and meditation are completely personal.

Prayer and meditation are any activities that draw you into a prayerful or meditative state. The best way I can describe it is that they give each moment more depth. You feel more present, more engaged, more real. This sense of calm concentration does not drain you; it spiritually energizes you.

Because these are natural states, many activities can produce the effect, and you can easily add your own. You are not limited to familiar images of someone sitting cross-legged on a beach at sunset. Consider these other examples:

Deep, slow breathing.
Gazing at a candle, campfire, or fireplace.
Walking in nature.
Watching clouds, rain, or snow.
Running, cycling, or other rhythmic exercise.
Slow stretching, Yoga, or Tai Chi.
Meditative music and sounds.
Watching an aquarium.
Listening to waves, rivers, or streams.
The sun, shining through stained glass windows.
Joining a prayer or recovery group.
Being absorbed in simple physical tasks.

If you have ever felt a quiet calmness during any of these, you already know what prayer and meditation feel like. Practice prayer and meditation in a way that works for you every day. Lack of time is no excuse because prayer and meditation enhance, and can be done concurrently with, many other activities. If you miss a day, do not be discouraged, but simply return to your practice. In the Steps, prayer and meditation is kind of a bootstrap process: you pray and meditate for guidance in your life. And that motivates you toward more prayer and meditation!

---

[20] Stephen Bodian, "Meditation for Dummies 2nd Edition", 2006, p264

Prayer and meditation can take two forms: formal and informal.[21] You can practice either, but doing both greatly enriches your spiritual life and emotional well-being.

Informal practice is part of your daily routine. You pray and meditate while doing dishes, cleaning the garage, taking a shower, or preparing for sleep at night. Prayer and meditation woven into daily life have a long tradition.[22]

Formal practice is usually done seated. You might start with as little as two to five minutes using the method of your choice. Even short sessions of meditation are very beneficial.[23]

Another type of formal practice can be found in structured movement disciplines like yoga, tai chi, and martial arts katas. For many, these practices are just as spiritually grounding and transformative as stillness-based meditation. However, I will not be covering these practices here.[24]

Rituals can help, but do not overload yourself.[25] You only need a few simple things: comfortable clothing, a quiet, distraction-free space, a bit of time, and a place to sit or lie down.[26] I prefer a plain office chair. But you might sit cross-legged on a cushion, lie on a mat, or relax in a recliner. Some positions may make you fall asleep, and if that happens, no problem. But sleeping is not praying or meditating.

Finally, in prayer[27] and meditation,[28] try to develop a humble and receptive attitude. A judgmental ego blocks spiritual progress. Do not be concerned if you are "doing it right." This is an opportunity to form a relationship with your Higher Power and enter a deeper spiritual state.

Do not over complicate it.[29] Some books say: don't smoke, don't drink caffeine, don't eat beforehand, meditate first thing in the morning, meditate before bed, meditate 20 minutes every day, don't scratch an itch, sign a meditation contract, sit a certain way, use an app, burn incense, open a window, face a direction, focus on a mantra… and on and on.

You can have a hole in your ego, and you can have a hole in your soul. What matters is which one you give the most attention to. --TA

---

[21] I borrowed these from Shamash Alidina, "Mindfulness for Dummies", 2010, p10

[22] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Practice_of_the_Presence_of_God

[23] https://www.onepeloton.com/blog/how-long-should-you-meditate

[24] I have taken Tai Chi and martial arts training, and dabbled in Yoga. I highly recommend these, but they are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this book.

[25] When I began formal prayer and meditation, I started simply: deep breathing, a spiritual reading, then prayer and meditation. Over time, I added incense, extra readings, even a tabletop fountain. Eventually, the ritual became so elaborate I had to rush to finish before work — creating stress instead of peace. So, keep it simple. You'll enjoy it more and gain more benefit. If you want to explore different tools, rotate them over time.

[26] Victor Davich, "8 Minute Meditation", 2014

[27] Matthew 18:3

[28] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Relaxation_Response #Eliciting_the_response

[29] My first experience with prayer came at Catholic school, where the rules felt overwhelming. Later, I tried meditation through Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's "Transcendental Meditation", circa 1972, which required a secret mantra and, for me at the time, a hefty fee.

For now, set the rules aside. If prayer and meditation appeal to you, you will practice. If they do not, no rule will change that. What matters is that you begin in the easiest, simplest way possible.

You may find that light stretching or mild exercise beforehand deepens your practice. I sometimes use ambient music, affirmations, or guided meditations. Experiment, enjoy it, and make your practice your own.

Know[3.6-06] Types of Prayer

One way to understand prayer is with the acronym ACTS:[30]

A - adoration, glorify God, awe of Higher Power/creation.
C - confession, admitting mistakes/wrongdoings.
T - thanksgiving, gratitude for blessings: relationships, health, food, shelter.
S - supplication, praying for nonmaterial things like serenity and wisdom.

As you grow spiritually, explore how to weave these different kinds of prayer into your daily life.

Two Basic Types of Meditation[31]

Focused meditation centers your attention on your breath, a prayer, mantra, idea, or feeling.[32] Mindfulness invites awareness and acceptance of thoughts, bodily sensations, or external events.[33] So, focused meditation narrows your lens to center attention, while mindfulness opens the frame to whatever arises in the present moment without judgment.

Core Practices and Techniques

Your breathing patterns change under stress[34], and even one deep breath can make you feel calmer.[35] Practicing breath awareness for even a year can have a great impact on your spiritual development.[36] Breathing gives you direct access to your emotional state and cognitive functions.[37]

Know[3.6-07] Diaphragmatic Breathing[38]

Sit or lie down with your back straight. Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose, drawing air into your lower lungs and belly. Imagine filling your belly like a balloon.

Exhale calmly through your mouth or nose, letting your belly collapse. Make your exhale slightly longer than your inhale, for example, inhale to a count of 4, exhale to a count of 6. This is called 4-6 breathing and works very well.

---

[30] https://www.gotquestions.org/ACTS-prayer.html
[31] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation#Classifications
[32] https://www.verywellmind.com/practice-focused-meditation-3144785
[33] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness
[34] Elizabeth Ann Scott, "8 Keys to Stress Management"
[35] https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-relief-breathing-techniques
[36] Eckhart Tolle, "A New Earth", 2005
[37] https://www.mindful.org/breath-brains-remote-control/
[38] Michael Townsend Williams, "Do Breathe", 2015, Blinkist Summary

Diaphragmatic breathing activates the vagus nerve, which slows your heart rate and engages your parasympathetic nervous system, bringing relaxation.[39] Try diaphragmatic breathing now. Practice 3 to 5 breaths as outlined above. Notice how you immediately begin to feel calm and centered. Congratulations! You have just completed your first meditation!

Know[3.6-08] Counting Breaths: This builds on diaphragmatic breathing by adding a simple mental anchor. Count each exhale silently to yourself. After a session, check the clock to see how many breaths occurred in five minutes. From then on, you will know how long you have been meditating simply by counting, no need to open your eyes or use an alarm.

100 Breaths:[40] Sit comfortably, breathe naturally, and simply count backward on each exhale from 100 to 0. If you lose track, simply return to counting. For shorter meditations, begin at a lower number.

Relaxation Response:[41] Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and relax. Breathe normally. Silently say "one" on each exhale. Continue for 10-20 minutes, once or twice daily, ideally not right after eating.

Calmness is constructive of good. Agitation is destructive of good.

--Hazelden Foundation, "Twenty-Four Hours a Day", May 10

Know[3.6-09] 4-7-8 Breathing:[42]

Inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
Hold your breath for a count of 7.
Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 8.
Repeat.

Experiment with different counts. Try counting breaths on your fingers, or beads, adding a tactile focus that deepens your meditative experience.

Cyclic Sigh:[43] Begin a deep breath and fill your lungs; when they feel full, add an additional short breath intake, then sigh the entire breath out until your lungs are completely empty.

Combat Tactical Breathing:[44] ("Box Breathing") Tactical breathing can help you focus, gain control over worry, and manage stress. Simply count while you breathe: breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts (through your nose or mouth), and pause for 4 counts. Repeat as needed.

Try each of these various breathing techniques. They all work. What I have learned to do, over time, I call "stacking". I use a technique for five minutes and then switch to another across my meditation time. It seems to keep me engaged and compounds the relaxing and deepening effect.

---

[39] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201803/how-does-vagusstoff-vagus-nerve-substance-calm-us-down
[40] https://www.theemotionmachine.com/100-breaths-meditation/
[41] Herbert Benson, MD & Miriam Z. Klipper, Relaxation Response", 1976
[42] https://www.webmd.com/balance/what-to-know-4-7-8-breathing
[43] https://med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2023/02/cyclic-sighing-can-help-breathe-away-anxiety.html
[44] https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents

Know[3.6-10] The Serenity Prayer[45]

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

You begin the prayer by addressing God (you may use Higher Power or another term), with humility and respect. Remember that you are asking for help with a problem. You are not demanding things go your way.

After opening the conversation, you ask for three specific things: serenity, courage, and wisdom. You are not asking for cash to clear the rent this month, or your partner to understand you better, or to find your lost dog. Those prayers may come later, but right now you are asking for help *within yourself.* If you are praying as part of your daily routine, you are seeking help with difficult situations you encounter today.

1. You are asking God for the serenity, or peace of mind, that allows you to *accept* those situations or events *that you cannot change.* There are many things in life you cannot change, and yet you often torture yourself with "maybe," "what if," or "if only". This time, you are asking God to give you the peace of mind to accept those events and situations that are out of your control, or already in the past.

2. You are asking for the *courage* to step up and work on the *things you can change.* They might be small things, a word to the right person, or an action at the right time. Or it might be something that will change your life forever. No matter how big or small the change might be, you need courage to approach it. Nelson Mandela said, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." With sufficient courage, you can change what must be changed. So, you ask for that courage.

3. You must decide what can be changed and what cannot. Otherwise, you waste time and effort by attempting the impossible, or you miss an opportunity to make the world better. Asking for *wisdom* allows you to discern *the difference between what you can change and what you cannot.*

Saying the Serenity Prayer is asking for help in relieving a conflict within yourself. The conflict results from confusion between what you think reality should be, and what is. For this internal conflict, you ask for internal change.

You ask only for internal personal growth. You do not ask for the world or other people to change. You are asking only for change within yourself. Prayer works best when you pray to make yourself better.

The Serenity Prayer is easy to remember and one of the first tools people pick up in recovery. It is helpful in difficult times, and an introduction to a basic precept of Stoicism: accepting reality. This is called "Living life on life's terms."[46] If you have never prayed before, or have not prayed for a long time, this is a great, short prayer to start.

---

[45] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer

[46] http://www.minnesotarecovery.info/literature/phrases.htm

Know[3.6-11] The Lord's Prayer[47]

In prayer all are equal. --Rumi

Perhaps the best-known words Jesus spoke, this is the prayer given when his disciples asked him, "…teach us to pray." It is brief, elegant, and profound. When you pray, it is your intent and sincerity that matter more than specific words.[48] Prayer is not a formula or recipe; it is a spiritual state of your mind and heart. While often associated with Christianity, the Lord's Prayer expresses a spiritual yearning that transcends religious boundaries. Its language is rooted in tradition, but its message is universal.

Origen, the early Christian mystic, says that before you pray:[49]

Take a moment to be calm and think of who you are praying to.
Do not pray in anger.
Do not ask for material things.
Forgive those, as best you can, who have wronged you.
Put aside distractions.

The following paragraphs are the Lord's Prayer (in italics). I have written a few descriptive words after each phrase, and included excerpts from "Origen on Prayer," (circa 100 CE) and "Meditations on the Lord's Prayer," written by Herbert Prochnow in 1959.

Our Father, who art in heaven,

You speak to your Higher Power, "Our Father," who is greater than you, and cares for you. "In heaven" is a better place, a better state of existence.

From Origen: "Let us, therefore, not think that it is words we are taught to say in any appointed season of prayer. On the contrary, if we understand our former consideration of prayer without ceasing, let our whole life of prayer without ceasing speak the words "Our Father in the Heavens," having its commonwealth in no wise on earth but in every way in heaven, which is God's throne because of the foundation of the kingdom of God in all who wear the image of the Heavenly One and therefore become heavenly."

From Prochnow: "We must not be discouraged when great problems beset us and we grow weary. We must not be dismayed because life is perplexing. We must not be depressed if we suffer for well doing and if our days are full of trouble. We must not despair in the days of adversity and tribulation when our burdens seem more than we can bear. We must never forget that we have, our Father, the loving Father, the holy Father in heaven."

---

[47] "Origen on Prayer" by the Christian mystic, Origen, circa 234 AD, which I borrow from liberally, along with "Meditations on the Lord's Prayer", 1959, Herbert Prochnow. I use the King James version here because I learned it as a child, and I like the archaic language. You may be more comfortable with the World English Bible version in Wisdom, The Gospel of Matthew 6:09-6:13.

[48] See Wisdom, The Gospel of Matthew, Matt[018] 6:07 In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking.

[49] "Origin on Prayer", Chapter 20, "The Formalities of Prayer: Conclusion

Hallowed be thy name.

Your Higher Power is sacred, holy. You show reverence and respect. Your Higher Power is a presence you speak to, and from which you receive wisdom and guidance. Acknowledging that you are addressing something sacred inspires a state of humility in yourself. When you respectfully address holiness, you enter a more holy state.

From Origen: "…in the case of God, inasmuch as He is himself ever unchangeable and unalterable, the proper name which even He may be said to bear is ever one, that mentioned in Exodus, "He that is," or the like. Since therefore, though we all have some notion of God, conceiving of Him in various ways, but not all of what He is, for few and, be it said, fewer than few are they who comprehend His compete holiness—we are with good reason taught to attain to a holy conception of Him in order that we may see His holiness as creator, provider, judge, elector, abandoner, acceptor, rejector, rewarder and punisher of each according to his desert."

From Prochnow: "We say, Hallowed be thy name, but we deny God repeatedly in our daily lives. … we refuse to do God's will. …We worship progress… goods… success… fame. But it is God whom we should worship."

Thy Kingdom come,

You humbly ask for a spiritual experience. You ask your Higher Power to come here, to you, and enter your life here and now.

From Origen: "According to the word of our Lord and Savior, the Kingdom of God does not come observably, nor shall men say 'Lo it is here', or 'Lo is it there', but the Kingdom of God is within us… It is therefore plain that he who prays for the coming of the kingdom of God prays with good reason for… perfecting of God's kingdom within him."

From Prochnow: "When we pray Thy kingdom come, we are making a serious petition. We are asking that much of all the world believes in should be changed. We are asking for profound changes in our own lives."

Thy will be done, on Earth, as it is in Heaven.

Religion can make "God's will" sound scary and harsh. But this phrase means to make the world better, do the right thing, be a good person. God's will runs the universe. Your purpose is to live in harmony with it. You ask your Higher Power to change you "on earth" and be nearer to you: "your kingdom come". You ask to know and fulfill your purpose: "your will be done"

From Origen: "And when the will of God as it is in heaven has been accomplished by us also who are on earth, we shall inherit a kingdom of heaven as having, alike with them, worn the image of the Heavenly One, while those who come after us on earth are praying to become in turn like us who have come to be in heaven."

From Prochnow: "…it is only when the will of God is done that his kingdom can come… We must ask ourselves whether we really wish God's will to be done in earth as it is in heaven… We are to be meek and lowly in heart[50] if we are to do God's will and find rest for our souls… We are to follow righteousness, faith, love, patience, meekness if we wish God's kingdom to come in earth as it is in heaven."

Give us this day our daily bread,

You ask only for what you need. You trust each day to your Higher Power. Your spiritual path is more important than material possessions.

From Origen: "And my Father, He says, gives you the true bread from heaven, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. It is true bread that nourishes the true man who is made in God's image, and he that has been nourished by it also becomes in the Creator's likeness. What is more nourishing to the soul than Word, or what more precious to the mind of him that is capable of receiving it than the Wisdom of God?"

From Prochnow: "…it is a simple petition. It is not for luxuries. It is not for more than we need. It is not for an abundance of everything. It is for bread and the necessities of life."

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

You admit you made mistakes. You take responsibility and ask forgiveness. Your Higher Power forgives you (and you can forgive yourself) when you forgive others. This is the key to your freedom. It is not a bargain; it is a process. The more you forgive others, the more you open the door to your Higher Power.

From Origen: "Our very activities in transgression leave their impression within our mind and become the indictment against us on which we shall be brought to trial when, as it were, the books that have been indicted by us all shall be brought forth, in the time when we shall all stand before the judgment seat…"

From Prochnow: "We are only able to receive forgiveness when we forgive. Only as we open our hearts and forgive others can God's mercy, kindness and forgiveness come into our hearts… When one has forgiven others and has received forgiveness, his life is changed."

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

This phrase covers a lot in a few words. You ask that you not be given more than you can handle. You ask for the wisdom to make better decisions and fewer mistakes.

---

[50] By "lowly in heart" he means "humble." You cannot find your true purpose ('do God's will') if you are driven by your ego.

From Origen: "More than human temptation has not possessed you, and God is to be trusted not to let you be tempted beyond your power but to make the temptation be accompanied by the outlet of power to endure it… [Life is a trial, therefore] let us for that reason pray for deliverance from trial not through being exempt from it - that is an utter impossibility for beings on earth - but through not succumbing under it."

From Prochnow: "No human being lives without trials - often terrible trials. There are noble struggles that seem to end in disastrous failure. There are men who labour and are heavy laden throughout life. There is suffering. There are those with sorrow in their hearts daily. Thus we may well say, 'Lead us not into trial.' … But we know that trial and test are unavoidable in life. And when we do meet trials, we pray, 'Deliver us from evil.' We need God's help and strength and guidance in our trials so that we will choose the good and not the evil."

For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever,[51]

Again, you acknowledge that your Higher Power is great, and good, and holy. You do not say this because your Higher Power needs to hear it, but because *you* need to hear it.

From Prochnow: "The Lord's Prayer comes to a close with a great burst of praise and joy… we proclaim that the world belongs not to Caesar. It belongs to God. The world belongs not to empires and kingdoms and great military powers. It belongs to God. The world belongs not to those who have wealth and luxury and riches. It belongs to God. The world belongs not to those who have fame and position and the acclaim of men. It belongs to God."

Amen.

The final word of the prayer originates from Hebrew and is an affirmation of agreement meaning "verily", "truly", or "so be it".[52] It means you agree with the words you have said and close the prayer by affirming it.

You can pray like this, word-for-word. Think about what you are saying. Do not make empty repetitions. Or use your own words. This is an excellent example. Sincerity counts. Mean what you say, or do not say it.

Prayer and meditation lay a strong spiritual foundation, grounded in presence, humility, and sincerity. You may eventually want to try more advanced techniques. They are not required, and they are not necessarily "better." They are simply different approaches that can help you grow, reflect, and connect in new ways. Use what works and leave the rest; shape your spiritual path in the way that works best for you.

---

[51] This final phrase is not included in "Origen on Prayer" and is not part of the Catholic version of the Lord's Prayer (Catholic Mass For Dummies by Rev. John Trigilio, Jr., Rev. Kenneth Brighenti, Rev. Monsignor James Cafone, p78). Herbert Prochnow discusses the phrase in "Meditations on the Lord's Prayer" but states it was probably not part of the original prayer. It is, however, included in the World English Bible (Wisdom, Gospel of Matthew 6:13).

[52] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amen

Advanced Practices and Tools

Guided or Assisted Practice: There are countless apps, soundtracks, videos, and tools available to support meditation, hypnosis, and self-suggestion. Some are helpful; others may not suit your needs. I often use audio tracks, but sometimes I prefer silence. It is important to also practice without assistance, so you can pray and meditate anytime, anywhere, under any conditions. Use what works for you.

Know[3.6-12] Visualization[53]

You possess the incredible ability to create scenes in your mind so vividly that your brain responds as if those scenes were real.[54] Although it is commonly called "visualization," the process engages more than sight, it can include sound, smell, taste, touch, and most importantly, emotion.

Visualization is a natural skill we all have to varying degrees. Even if you think you cannot visualize, the good news is that this ability improves with practice.[55] The more you do it, the stronger it becomes. You do not need any special equipment. Just a place to sit and the brain in your head.

The purpose of visualization is simple: to make your life better. In the context of prayer and meditation, visualization helps you reach a calm, open state of mind. It sharpens your focus, and supports spiritual connection. Through visualization, you communicate with silent parts of yourself, and your Higher Power.

To visualize, bring the scene to life with vivid sensory detail: sight, sound, touch, even smell or taste. Personal memories enhance realism, and emotion is key. Feelings like joy, gratitude, or peace engage your brain's limbic system[56] and deepen the effect.[57] Visualization is not limited to mental pictures; it is a living, spiritual experience.

The best way to learn visualization is to practice it. Read through one of the scripts that follow until understand the idea. You want to try to capture the sense of it, the mood. You can also record it into a device and play it back. When you are ready, close your eyes and either listen to your recording, or simply visualize the scene in the script as vividly as possible. Use all your senses. There is no time limit. No right or wrong way. Just enjoy it.

---

[53] "Visualization" has vastly different meanings, depending on context. 1. A popular definition is the idea that visualizing a desired outcome or goal can somehow "manifest" your desires. It refers to changing physical reality with your mind. I sharply reject this idea, as it is the antithesis of learning to live well in harmony with reality. 2. Another use of the word is to describe a process of mental practice for the purpose of improving skills, character, or personal wellness. It is changing yourself while accepting reality. 3. Visualization can also be used to induce calm, relaxation, and meditative and prayerful states. For this entry in Prayer & Meditation, I use the latter definition.

[54] https://www.mindmovies.com/blogroll/the-neuroscience-of-visualization

[55] https://bulletproofmusician.com/get-good-mental-imagery-even-youve-never-able-visualize-worth-darn/

[56] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_system

[57] https://www.mindmovies.com/blogroll/the-neuroscience-of-visualization

Know[3.6-13] On the Beach[58]

You find yourself on a beautiful beach. Step into white sand...
Look down… the sand is warm and soft under your feet.
You see grains of sand sticking to the top of your feet.
Just feel the sensations of your feet in the sand.
You feel the sun on your skin.
Perhaps you can feel a light breeze as well.
Looking up, you see a bright blue sky.
Perhaps you can see little wisps of white clouds.
You notice the smell of the salty air…
And hear the waves rolling on the beach.

Walk toward the waves.
As you get closer, the waves get louder.
And you get to where the ocean meets the sand,
and you see the waves coming up and down….
Feel how the sand becomes firm and wet and cool under your feet.
The waves splash on the beach and then recede again.
And you see some things in the sand like shells,
pieces of seaweed…your own footprints…
and you see a little piece of driftwood…

It is the perfect size for writing in the sand.
Pick up this driftwood and draw your name
in the sand where it's wet.
Write out each letter of your name, neatly and carefully,
noticing the sound that it makes as you scratch it though the sand.
Now step back and look at your name.
As you see your beautiful name
that's carried you though your whole life,
you notice a little wave coming closer…
This wave catches part of your name and washes it away.

And then another wave comes
and washes your name away even more…
And another, until all you see are ripples in the sand…
You feel connected to the beach, and the ocean, and the sky.
Now continue walking along the beach, noticing your surroundings.
Can you hear seabirds flying over?
Or the wind gently blowing?
Can you feel the warm sun on your skin?
How does the sand feel under your feet?
Maybe you can smell the ocean.
It's nice. You feel calm and comfortable.
Just be at your beach today.
Stay as long as you like.

---

[58] Adapted from a script licensed from MindfulnessExercises.com

Know[3.6-14] The Lake[59]

Lie down or sit comfortably and allow your eyes to close.
Take a few moments to scan your awareness,
through the sensations of your body, and wherever possible,
soften and release obvious areas of physical tension.
This can be at the end of a long day, or any time.
Allow your attention to gently come into your body,
to the flowing of your breath.
Experience the sense of your body as a whole,
simply lying or sitting here and breathing.

When you feel ready, picture in your mind's eye
the image of a lake, perhaps a lake that you know well
and that you go to from time to time,
or one that you've seen in a photograph,
Just see if you can bring that image
into vivid focus in your mind's eye.
Notice how it's an extended body of water
held within the earth's surface,
and perhaps fed by a spring or a stream...
If you watch and observe the lake carefully,
you'll notice that it's always changing,
and yet it's also always itself.

It changes as the sun moves across the sky.
The light is reflected off the water in different ways.
It changes depending on the weather.
Sometimes, on very calm days, the surface might be like glass
and reflect everything that comes by,
like clouds, birds, the trees that might surround the lake,
the sun as it makes its journey across the sky,
and for that matter, the moon and the stars at night.
So there are times when the lake
is extremely reflective and contains,
in a certain way, everything that comes by or over it.

In different periods of time, the surface might be choppy,
and sometimes the waves are quite visible and pronounced,
in which times the light might sparkle
off the waves in different ways,
Of course, the lake changes through the seasons.
In the winter, depending on its location, it might be frozen over,
Through day and night, and through the seasons,
and through the years,
the lake is constantly changing
but always is its own essential nature.
Stay at the lake as long as you like, perhaps thinking to yourself,
How much like it you are, always changing, but always being you.

---

[59] Adapted from a script licensed from MindfulnessExercises.com

Know[3.6-15] Practicing Visualization[60]

The following exercises build your visualization ability. Use them anytime you have a few minutes, or as a regular part of your practice.

Picture Recreation: Find a meaningful photo of someone you care about, or a place you love. Study it carefully, then close your eyes and recreate it in your mind. Repeat until you can clearly visualize every detail.

Object Focus: Hold a small object like a pen or a coffee cup. Examine it closely, then close your eyes and visualize it. When you can see it clearly, rotate it in your mind. Imagine it in different settings.

Eyes-Open Visualization: Now recreate the same object, but with your eyes open. Imagine it interacting with the environment, casting shadows, reflecting light. This strengthens your ability to project and integrate imagery.

Scene Interaction: Return to one of the earlier scene visualizations, like the beach or the lake. Notice if you see yourself from the outside (third person) or through your own eyes (first person). Move around in the scene. Pick up a rock. Sit in a chair. Put your toes in the water. Try flying. Invite another person into the scene and have a conversation. Pay attention to how it feels.

Know[3.6-16] Symbolic and Emotional Imagery

Visualization is a way to communicate with deeper levels of yourself. The symbols you create carry weight and meaning. You are always sending messages to yourself; they can be healing or harmful. Use positive imagery for growth, clarity, and peace. Below are guided prompts to explore. Try one or two per session, and repeat the ones that resonate with you.

Walk a wooded trail. Smell the trees. Hear the birds. What do you find?
Feel yourself on a descending elevator going deeper and deeper down.
Feel yourself ascending on an elevator going into the clouds and light.
Climb up or down stairs. Are they wooden or stone? Where do they lead?
Feel roots growing from your feet and spine, anchoring to the Earth.
A glowing orb hovers above your head bathing you in celestial light.
Imagine tiny LED lights in your muscles dimming as you relax.
Picture a still lake. When ripples appear, calm them with your mind.
All your worries are stones in a field. They become butterflies and fly away.
Visualize turning down a control labeled "Anxiety" or "Anger".

Final Thoughts on Visualization

You can find other visualizations from books, art, or your own dreams, but the ones that work best will be the ones that feel emotionally right. If a visualization feels wrong, skip it. Your mind knows when something fits. Trust that. Let your visualizations be beautiful, meaningful, and aligned with your values. Keep experimenting, and let your inner world become a space of healing, growth, and light.

---

[60] Luciano Passuello, "The Very Best of Litemind", 2009, "How to Develop Your Visualization Skill"

Know[3.6-17] Autogenic Training[61]

Autogenic Training is a self-directed relaxation technique developed by German psychiatrist Johannes Heinrich Schultz in the early 1900s. Schultz observed that people in deep hypnosis experienced specific physical sensations: heavy limbs, slowed breathing, warmth, and calm. He reasoned that if the body could respond this way under hypnosis, maybe we could train it to respond the same way on purpose. Turns out, we can.

Autogenic Training works by combining passive awareness with a series of verbal cues that trigger relaxation. It is simple and does not require equipment or external guidance. With consistent practice, you can enter a state of deep calm and physical ease by using your own mind. That makes it especially valuable in recovery, spiritual practice, or any setting where stress reduction and emotional balance are needed.

Research has shown benefits for anxiety, insomnia, high blood pressure, chronic pain, and even some psychosomatic conditions. I would add that it is also just a good way to clear your mental slate, reset your nervous system, and settle back into yourself when you are feeling scattered.

Autogenic Training uses six simple, repeatable phrases that you say silently to yourself while in a relaxed position. You do not have to "believe" them, just repeat them slowly, and allow your body to respond. You are giving your brain and body a suggestion, not a command.

Heaviness: "My arms and legs are heavy."
This cue relaxes the muscles and signals the body to release tension.

Warmth: "My arms and legs are warm."
The sense of warmth helps open circulation and deepen relaxation.

Heartbeat: "My heartbeat is calm and regular"
This brings awareness to your heart and encourages a steady rhythm.

Breathing: "My breathing is calm and regular."
You do not control your breath, just observe it and affirm its natural flow.

Abdomen: "My solar plexus is warm."
This focuses promotes calm, ease, and grounding.

Forehead: "My forehead is cool."
A cool forehead can relieve tension and help with mental clarity.

You can practice sitting, lying down, or even reclining in a chair. Repeat each phrase 3-6 times silently, going at a slow and steady pace. If your mind wanders, that is fine, just bring it gently back to the next phrase. If a phrase does not resonate, skip it. You can always come back to it later.

Start with five minutes, then ten. Eventually, it becomes a natural tool you can use almost anywhere. Over time, you may find that your body starts to respond automatically when you begin the sequence, like it is following an old familiar path back to peace.

---

[61] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autogenic_training

Contemplative Stillness

Know[3.6-18] Just Sitting:[62] the Zen of doing nothing.

> *All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.*
>
> --Blaise Pascal

Meditation does not always require a technique. Sometimes, it is as simple as staying present with whatever you are doing. Try just sitting. Turn off electronics, close the door, and sit in stillness. Do not close your eyes. Do not follow your breath. Do not repeat a mantra. Simply sit. Notice your thoughts, your breath, the weight of your body, the sounds around you. Observe without judgment, without effort. No doing. Just being.

Know[3.6-19] Mindfulness:[63] Awareness and Nonjudgmental Presence

Humans operate in two basic modes: doing and being.[64] Mindfulness strengthens the being mode, so that you fully experience the present moment without judgment, distraction, or resistance. This state requires discipline and practice. It trains your brain to go off autopilot and come back to now.

The popularity of mindfulness has skyrocketed, because when the mind wanders into default mode, we are more stressed, anxious, and unhappy.[65] Mindfulness reduces this mental clutter.

A common mistake, when practicing mindfulness, is the mistaken idea that ordinary thinking is "wrong thinking and obscures some kind of transcendent truth."[66] It is not better, only different. Mindfulness is one point along the spectrum of human awareness.[67] Thinking, planning, and doing have their place. With mindfulness, however, you let go of the compulsion to fix, label, and escape your experience. Once you start measuring how "mindful" you are, you are no longer being mindful

Know[3.6-20] Relaxation for Mindfulness: The Body Scan

One powerful mindfulness technique is the body scan. This is not something you "do" in the active sense. It is something you experience. It is reconnecting with yourself.[68]

Find a private space where you will not be disturbed. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Let your clothing be loose. You may close your eyes. Either read the script[69] below aloud or silently, or record it and play it back.

---

[62] Steve Hagen, "Buddhism Is Not What You Think", 2003

[63] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness

[64] Shamash Alidina, "Mindfulness for Dummies," 2010, p71

[65] Domyo Sater Burk, "Mindfulness" (Idiot's Guides), Part 3

[66] I quote this because it is exactly what happened to me:
Domyo Sater Burk, "Mindfulness" (Idiot's Guides), Part 3

[67] This model from Ken Wilber, "The Spectrum of Consciousness", 1977

[68] Adapted from a web page labeled from public domain on 8 Jan 2021:
http://www.tangoalpha.org/resources/fullbodyscan.html which was itself adapted from a web page that no longer exists: http://satipatthana.org/kabatzinn.html

[69] Modified script licensed from MindfulnessExercises.com

You are in a safe, quiet place. No one needs you right now. Let go of the need to change anything. Let this moment be exactly as it is. Any judgments, expectations, or self-criticism can fade away. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Whatever you sense or feel is valid.

Bring your awareness to your fingertips. What are they touching? Move through each finger slowly. Now become aware of your breath. Let your belly rise and fall naturally. Feel your toes, notice them. Can you imagine your breath reaching all the way down to your toes?

As you exhale, allow your legs to relax deeply. Now do the same with your arms. On your next breath, imagine your breath filling your entire head, softening your face, eyes, jaw, and mind. Feel your brain restoring itself with each inhale. Let your thoughts float by like clouds, without attaching to them.

Now, imagine you are sitting on a beach watching the surface of a vast ocean. You can only see the top, but deep beneath, profound change is taking place. Feel those deep currents you are normally unaware of. Your body is healing; your mind is rebalancing. Let go. Trust the process. Be here now.

When finished, gently return to awareness. Sit for a moment, take a breath, and resume your day with gratitude.

Know[3.6-21] Everyday Mindfulness

Mindfulness does not require special equipment or a designated time slot. It can be practiced anywhere, anytime. The principle is simple: bring your attention to the present moment without judgment.[70] Nothing mystical, mysterious, or esoteric. Just be here. Just be now.

We overcomplicate life. We have lost the ability to enjoy existence without trying to fix it. And because mindfulness takes effort, it means pulling your attention back to now, over and over. People want a shortcut, but there is no shortcut. This is the practice of mindfulness.

To help you become mindful, try using a "landmark", a sensation, action, or moment that grounds you in the present. Here are a few you can use:[71]

Gratitude: Start with one thing you are thankful for.
Breathing: Notice your breath without changing it. Just experience it.
Stretching: Feel your body move. Notice muscle tension and release.
Looking: Choose one object and observe it as if seeing it for the first time.
Hearing: Close your eyes and listen. Let sounds arrive without labeling.
Touching: Pay attention to what you are holding or brushing against.
Thinking: Pause and notice what thoughts are flowing through your mind.
Feeling: Let emotions flow through you with labeling them. Let them pass.
Routine: Make the bed, wash a dish, sweep the floor, fully present.
Nature: Sit by a tree, walk by a river. Observe without analysis.
Eating: Slow down. Name the food. Chew thoroughly. Taste it fully.
Find Your Own: Anything that brings you to your senses is a landmark.

Life is teaching you. Pay attention. --TA

---

[70] Gilly Pickup, "The Little Book of Mindfulness", 2019

[71] A few are my ideas. Unless otherwise noted, the rest are from Shamash Alidina, "Mindfulness for Dummies", 2010, Gilly Pickup, "The Little Book of Mindfulness", 2019; Domyo Sater Burk, "Mindfulness" (Idiot's Guides)

Know[3.6-22] Practicing the Presence of God[72]

A 17th century monk named Brother Lawrence became known for the idea that the presence of God could be acquired and strengthened through persistent practice. He explained it this way, "Having found in many books different methods of going to GOD, and diverse practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me, than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing but how to become wholly GOD's."

Simply put, the spiritual practices Brother Lawrence found in his reading only confused and distracted him from his goal, which was "to become wholly GOD's," or as I would say, develop his spirituality and live a good life. He describes how he became aware of a Higher Power he called "God":

… I worshipped Him the oftenest that I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandered from Him. … I continued it, [despite] all the difficulties that occurred, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered… I made this my business, as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer; for at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of GOD.

Brother Lawrence is describing the process of spirituality through persistent practice over time. There is no magic formula or technique besides sincere desire and constant practice to develop a deep sense of spirituality.

A similar sentiment is expressed in "The Golden Key", by Emmet Fox:

But you must stop thinking of the trouble, whatever it is. The rule is to think about God, and if you are thinking about your difficulty, you are not thinking about God. To be continually glancing over your shoulder, as it were, in order to see how matters are progressing, is fatal, because that is thinking of the trouble, and you must think of God, and of nothing else. Your object is to drive the thought of the difficulty right out of your consciousness, for a few moments at least, substituting for it the thought of God.[73]

Use this method to deepen your spirituality along with other forms of prayer and meditation. Constantly remind yourself to think of, and about, your Higher Power. Practice thinking in this way as often as you can remember, or remind yourself, to do so.

Try this very practical idea: when you go through any doorway, whether entering or exiting a building, moving from one room to another, or getting in or out of your car, say a short prayer, or simply remind yourself, "My Higher Power is with me now." You do not need to feel anything special. You do not need a spiritual mood or setting. Just the act of calling your Higher Power to mind makes a difference. In the beginning, you may forget often, but keep trying. After a few days, you will have brought your Higher Power into your awareness hundreds of times. This is practicing the presence. It happens through small, quiet moments, repeated often.

---

[72] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ The_Practice_of_the_Presence_of_God
[73] From a 2 page summary of "The Golden Key to Prayer" by Emmet Fox, downloaded from http://www.metaphysicspirit.com

Inner Identity and Exploration

Know[3.6-23] Finding "I"[74]

The Ego is a veil between humans and God.

--Rumi

Try this exercise for a few minutes each day. Sit quietly and turn your attention inward. Ask yourself, slowly and deliberately, "Who am I… and who is asking that question?" Emphasize each word carefully: "If I am not I… then who am I?" Let the question echo in your mind. Follow your thoughts back to their source. "Who is thinking this thought?"

Practice this for thirty days, keeping track of your experiences in a notebook or calendar. Do it when you are happy, sad, energetic, tired, laughing, loving, or afraid. See what changes. This kind of self-inquiry can loosen your attachment to the word "I" and reveal how much of it is simply a mask you have learned to wear. Behind that mask is your awareness, your real self. And that is not "I." That is something deeper.

Sacred Center Meditation

The elements that make up your body were forged in the heart of an ancient star. That star, long dead, exploded across the universe, scattering its essence that later formed new stars, planets… and you. Your body is literally made from stardust, and that makes you part of something vast and eternal.

But your connection to the universe goes beyond the physical. Deep within you is a Sacred Center, a place untouched by time, circumstances, or judgment. It does not matter if other people like you, or not. It does not even matter if you like yourself. Nor does it matter what you have or have not done. None of that has anything to do with your Sacred Center.

This sacred, eternal aspect of you simply exists, and has always existed. It is above and below, beyond and within, the noise of your normal, mundane, everyday life. Through Sacred Center Meditation, you use the breath of your body, and visualization in your mind, to elevate your spirit. You align yourself with the part of you that is unshakable, whole, and forever loved.

Know[3.6-24] Sacred Center Meditation Step by Step

Find Stillness: Sit, stand, or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take in a slow, deep breath. Let the air fill your body, hold it for a moment, then exhale slowly. Repeat this breath two or three times. As you breathe, settle yourself into the present moment. Allow your body to relax.

Focus on Your Core: Bring your awareness to the center of your body, to your chest and belly, your solar plexus and heart area. Imagine a warm, radiant light glowing there, within you. The light can be any color you choose… sunlight gold, or calming blue, or serene green. This light has always been there, since the beginning of time. It is a gift to you from the universe. It is part of you, and you of it.

---

[74] Inspired by Mark Epstein, M.D., "Thoughts without a Thinker", 1995

Expand with Your Breath: Notice that as you inhale, the light gets warmer and brighter. It expands, and your awareness expands with it. Inhale slowly, imagining the light in your core growing brighter, and warmer. Feel it expand, spreading warmth and quiet joy through your entire being.

Hold for a Moment: At the top of your breath, hold it for a moment, feeling the light infuse and cleanse your body, mind, and spirit. Notice that you feel, for this instant, joy, peace, calm, happiness, and contentment. This is Grace, Divine Compassion, the Light of the Soul. Bliss.

Exhale Slowly: As you exhale, just allow the air to leave your body. Every muscle relaxes as you feel heavy and sink downward. Your body deflates like a balloon losing air, sinking inward, loose, relaxed. Let your exhale be slightly longer than your inhale, complete and spontaneous. Exhale through nose or mouth. Release worries, resentments, discontent… they don't belong here.

Recognize the Eternal Truth: As you continue breathing, reflect on this fundamental truth: You are loved, unconditionally and without effort. You do not have to earn this love; it has always been yours. It always will be. It is yours simply because you exist. This loving center is your core, your true and authentic self. It has always been. It will always be. It is not tethered to your ego, your pain, your cares, worries, or desires. It is separate from that. It is more real than all those temporary things. Let this idea settle deep into your unconscious mind. You do not have to work at it, just allow it to be there.

Sacred Center Daily Practice

You can practice Sacred Center Meditation anytime, anywhere (Do not practice while driving or operating machinery). You can start with as little as a few breaths at a time, a minute or less. Remind yourself often to make it a habit. Practice anywhere, while standing, walking, or sitting at your desk.

For a more formal practice, start with a few minutes at a time to breathe, center yourself, and connect with your inner Divinity. Continue your practice

The more you practice, the more it becomes second nature. In time, this sense of deep, unshakable peace will stay with you, no matter where you are or what is happening around you. You will have found that "pearl of great price" that you have spent your life seeking.

When you take it with you everywhere, an easy way to recall the simple steps of Sacred Center Meditation is this:

1. Breathe in the light.
2. Pause for peace and joy.
3. Breathe out. Relax.

Sacred Center Meditation Final Thoughts

At your core, beyond self-doubt, beyond the expectations of others, there is a part of you that is eternal, completely at peace, and deeply loved. This Sacred Center is always with you, a place of strength, calm, and connection to something greater than yourself. No matter what happens in life, with every breath, you can always return to this great, universal truth.

Know[3.6-25] Invisible Counselors[75]

This is a technique for turning to your imagination to consult with personalities you consider to be wise and helpful. Imagine drawing upon the ideas and experiences of the most brilliant people you can think of. In a meeting place of your choice, people you respect and admire gather to discuss your problems and goals, give you advice, and help you make plans. Introduced in 1938 by Napoleon Hill,[76] the idea sounds strange but is quite effective. Similar imaginative methods are used in problem solving and reframing techniques.

There is a learning curve involved. You will find it easier if you have been practicing some of the previous techniques, such as visualization. To get started:[77]

Think of people you can look up to as role models. They can be anyone you admire, such as historical figures, former teachers or caregivers, fictional characters, and so on. These personalities become your invisible counselors. Napoleon Hill counted among his invisible counselors Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, William James, and others.[78]

Close your eyes, and after using one of the previously described relaxation techniques, imagine yourself sitting and talking to one or more of your counselors. You can see yourself in a conference room, your kitchen or living room, or some other gathering place. Imagine the details as vividly as possible. Notice how your counselors look and sound, their hand gestures, and if they make eye contact. See and feel the furniture you are sitting on, your surroundings, the sounds and smells and general atmosphere.

Now bring up a problem, question, or situation for which you are seeking advice. Each of your counselors has special skills or experience you can benefit from. Tell them exactly how they can help you, or what specific questions you have for them. Listen attentively as they give advice or present you with a plan. Ask questions or get further clarification.

This technique allows you to set aside your personal biases and consider life from other points of view. You can, in fact, engage with your Higher Power in exactly this way. Although you may not have great success in the beginning, I assure you that the experience improves with persistent, repeated practice.

Your invisible counselors, in time, will appear to take on their own mannerisms and behaviors. You may receive surprising insight, motivation, and inspiration from regular use of this practice. This is an exciting technique, far out of the ordinary, but very rewarding and useful.

---

[75] https://www.sacred-texts.com/nth/tgr/tgr19.htm

[76] Napoleon Hill, "Think and Grow Rich", 1937; I introduce this technique but I do not recommend this book as a whole; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t-ZGDUg8Bo&list=PLLvfK83TeHUs3DV54KzhyIyvycJ1QSKea&index=3

[77] https://www.theemotionmachine.com/the-invisible-counselors-technique/

[78] https://meditationadvise.weebly.com/meditationadvise/napoleon-hills- weird-invisible-counselor-technique-and-why-it-inspired-and-scared-so-manypeople

Know[3.6-26] Divine Reading (Lectio Divina)[79]

The practice of divine reading, or *Lectio Divina*, is a powerful way to engage spiritual or inspirational texts as a form of prayer and meditation. Traditionally used with scripture, the same process applies to other meaningful writings. I use the English phrase *divine reading* to distinguish this broader application.

The idea is simple: you invite your Higher Power to help you absorb deeper meaning from what you read. Reading becomes more than gathering information, it becomes a sacred encounter, a conversation with your Higher Power, opening your heart to insight, wisdom, and change.

How to Practice Divine Reading (Alone or in Groups)

Prepare Mentally and Spiritually: Begin by centering yourself through prayer, meditation, or a moment of silence. If in a group, say a simple opening prayer together, like the Serenity Prayer. This sets the mood and invites openness.

Read Carefully and Slowly: Read the selected passage slowly and attentively. Let the words sink in. If alone, read aloud if possible. In a group, members can take turns reading aloud. Choose passages from scripture, the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve, or any text that speaks to spiritual growth.

Reflect and Contemplate: Pause to reflect on the text. What speaks to you? What challenges or comforts you? In a group, invite informal discussion, letting anyone who wishes share their insights. Be open to surprises, often the most unexpected voices bring powerful reflections.

Pray and Listen: Offer a simple prayer, asking your Higher Power to help you absorb the message and live it. Listen with your heart. Let the words settle into you without overthinking or dissecting them.

Rest in Quiet Awareness (Optional): If you are practicing alone, spend a few moments in silence afterward, resting in the presence of your Higher Power.

Close Together (If in a Group): End with a closing prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer or any prayer suitable to your group.

Tips for Personal Divine Reading

Make it part of your daily routine, even five minutes can center your day. The Wisdom section in this book provides excellent material for divine reading. The benefit of reading alone is flexibility, any time, any place. Reading inspirational material, like Leaves of Life, at the start of your day grounds you and opens you to guidance.

Divine Reading Final Thought

Whether alone or with others, divine reading transforms ordinary reading into a spiritual practice. It moves the words from the page into your life, with the help of your Higher Power.

---

[79] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina

Personal Integration

Know[3.6-27] Inner Focus: Creating Your Own Practice

I call the consolidation of prayer and meditation into regular practice, "Inner Focus". The phrase is both a noun and a verb. I do not think so much of prayer and meditation (nouns), nor do I think of myself as praying and meditating (verbs). I simply Inner Focus where and when I can, as often as I can. I try to make it like thinking a thought or breathing a breath.

Do not get hung up on terminology. You can call it "quiet time", "prayer time", or whatever you feel is appropriate.[80] It is the term you use to self-identify the sacred state when you look within and converse with your Higher Power.

Inner Focus is using the method of prayer or meditation that is appropriate at the time. Informally, it is akin to practicing the presence of God. Use breathing techniques when you can. Think often of your Higher Power in whatever situation life presents.

In formal practice, Inner Focus is the eclectic mix of methods and techniques that work for you. You can utilize breathing, visualization, and rituals of your choice. You may include physical meditations and movements, such as stretching, Yoga, Tai Chi, and Qi Gong. Your Inner Focus may include divine reading and journaling.[81]

Speaking to a Higher Power

Inner Focus is listening and speaking to your Higher Power. I use something like the Invisible Counselors method for this. My Higher Power takes the form of a real person who offers comfort and guidance.

You may suggest that communicating with a Higher Power in your imagination is just that, your imagination. And I would reply, "Of course it is!" That makes it no less relevant or useful. Symbols are a language you use to communicate with other levels of yourself. Your Higher Power during Inner Focus is a representation of your spiritual connection to the universe.

When you talk on the phone to someone you do not know, do you find yourself forming a mental picture of them? Speaking to your Higher Power during Inner Focus is like that. You need a symbolic representation to communicate. You are not creating an imaginary friend and then forcing yourself to believe it is your Higher Power. You are using your imagination to relate to something that is beyond your comprehension.

There is a reason many of the gods and demi-gods of myth and religion appear in human form.[82] We are human, and we identify and can communicate with what we perceive as having human characteristics.

---

[80] "Quiet time" is used often in AA literature. "Prayer time" is from Amanda, AA member.

[81] https://kripalu.org/resources/meditation-and-journaling-combining-practices-reflect-your-inner-world

[82] I am referring here specifically to the Greek and Roman pantheon, and the Christian Son of God, Jesus.

During Inner Focus, use your imagination to envision a relatable, loving, compassionate Higher Power. When you have that image in mind, your Higher Power will do the rest.

Start with light stretching or exercise to connect mind, body, and spirit. Then read the daily page from "Leaves of Life" or pick a random reading from the "Wisdom" section. After the reading, move into Inner Focus. You can play ambient music or meditative sounds in the background. Start with short sessions and extend them if you feel comfortable.

Use a simple breathing pattern that combines counting with calming suggestions. As you breathe in, count slowly. As you breathe out, repeat a phrase that promotes warmth, heaviness, and comfort in the body. Move attention gradually through your entire body. Continue for several cycles, repeating as needed until you feel calm and settled. Here is an example:

Breathe in, count "One..."
Breathe out, think, "My legs are warm and heavy..."
Breathe in, count "Two..."
Breathe out, "My arms are warm and heavy..."
Breathe in, count "Three..."
Breathe out, "My shoulders are warm and heavy..."
Breathe in, count "Four..."
Breathe out, "I am completely comfortable..."
Breathe in, count "Five..."
Breathe out, "My face is warm and relaxed..."
Breathe in, count "Six..."

Continue the breaths with further suggestions:
"My abdomen is warm and heavy..."
"My heartbeat is calm and steady..."
.. and so on.

To continue your session, use another technique, meditation, prayer, or put your thoughts and feelings into your journal. To close, use a gentle alarm, let the music fade out, or simply end when you feel complete. Inner Focus is flexible. If something helps your spiritual condition, add it to your toolbox. I find short sessions helpful, but 12-20 minutes are needed for a deep, peaceful state. After longer sessions, take notes. Inner Focus is like a dream state, easy to forget the insights if you do not write them down.

Spirituality does not have to be exotic or esoteric; it can be as simple as a mindful walk in the park, petting a cat,[83] or improving your relationships. If you reach inside and repeatedly touch your soul, eventually the world begins to fade and you sense a sacred presence. If you learn anything about prayer and meditation, learn this; it is the essence of spiritual practice:

Wear the path deeper by walking it sincerely and often.

---

[83] "12 Rules for Life", Jordan B. Peterson, 2018. Rule 12: "Pet a cat when you meet one in the street. Dogs are okay, too.'

Prayer & Meditation: Other Practices

There are many kinds of prayer, meditation, and altered states of consciousness. Thousands of books have been written on these subjects. Commercial products are available for meditation, biofeedback, and brainwave entrainment. More drastic measures call for fasting, sleep disruption, cranial stimulation, or altering consciousness with drugs.

I do not use invasive or intrusive practices. I do not take drugs. I no longer spend a lot of money on meditation books, videos, or audio products. For me, simple is better. I decided to stop seeking and start finding. The prayer and meditation methods in this section are what I use in my personal practice. I found what works for me, as I hope you will.

If you decide to further your practice through more expensive or experimental methods, I recommend you first become familiar with those explained here. You might have everything you need.

Know[3.6-28] Finding Your Path

Regardless of the method(s) you adopt, at times you will wonder if you are doing it correctly, or long enough, or consistently. Uncertainty is part of the process. You must find your own path to continue your practice.

There are an infinite number of destinations, and an infinite number of roads to get there.

--Chad, AA Member [Paraphrased]

In a revealing podcast episode, Dr. Laurie Santos of Yale University, and Robert Wright, author of "Why Buddhism is True", discuss their own meditation practice.[84] Mr. Wright suggests 20 minutes per day but admits his practice still has its highs and lows. Dr. Santos's regular practice is 10 minutes a day after an exercise routine. She also admits that on "lots of days" she does not meditate, but even a patchy practice brings beneficial results.

To doubt yourself is to be human. To fumble and forget, to have an inconsistent practice at times with highs and lows is normal. It is not a sign to quit but a signal to continue with renewed commitment.

It was only after months of intermittent practice that I gradually developed a daily commitment. And even now, I sometimes experience fits and starts. Prayer, meditation, and Inner Focus change you, and through you, change the world. You are better for it, and the world is a better place because of it.

Wayfarer, only your footprints are the path, and nothing more;
wayfarer, there is no path, you make the path as you walk.
As you walk you make the path, and as you turn to glance behind
you see the trail that you never shall return to tread again.
Wayfarer, there is no path, only wake trails on the sea.

--Antonio Machado

---

[84] Dr. Laurie Santos, "The Happiness Lab", S2E14

Other Spiritual Issues

There are issues that are commonly part of any discussion of spirituality:

Following a teacher.
Enlightenment, under a vast variety of terms.
The afterlife, or "what happens after we die?"

Know[3.6-29] Following a Teacher

Like a beautiful flower, full of colour, but without scent, are the fine but fruitless words of him who does not act accordingly. --The Dhammapada

Perhaps inoculated by the hypocrisy I witnessed in my youth, I never felt the urge to find and follow a spiritual teacher or guru. But since many of my spiritual ideas came from books, I was still vulnerable to disillusionment when those I considered wise proved themselves to be less than they presented or pretended to be.

History is filled with examples of fallen spiritual teachers, scandalized preachers, and leaders who built their authority on charisma, only to betray the trust of those who followed them. No faith tradition is immune. People who speak of humility, compassion, and service have been exposed for greed, control, and abuse. This is not to dismiss the good that many teachers do, but to remind you that they are human. And like all humans, they are prone to error, self-deception, and corruption when placed on a pedestal.

The danger is not only in the teacher, but in the follower who hands over their spiritual life entirely into another's hands. When you do this, you outsource your judgment, your discernment, and your connection to your Higher Power. You place a middleman between you and God, and you risk giving them power they were never meant to have. No matter how wise or gifted a teacher may be, your spiritual path is still your responsibility. Guidance is valuable. Blind obedience is dangerous.

It is not for us to judge a person; we cannot know what is in their heart. However, since you may be willing to trust your spiritual growth to another, there are considerations to keep in mind:

You are responsible for your own spiritual development. You may find someone to help and mentor you, but they should be helping you find your own path, not using you to validate their own.

Jesus said to "know the tree by its fruit."[85] If a person's life does not match their words, they are not a good teacher. No human is perfect, but if someone cannot or will not follow their own teachings, they are not a good teacher for you.

Zen Master Li Chi[86] said, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." True spiritual growth is internal and personal. Someone may facilitate your spiritual growth, but that does not mean they are the cause of it. Eventually you must find your own path.

---

[85] Matthew 7:15-20

[86] https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lin-chi

Know[3.6-30] Enlightenment

Give me a word, give me a sign.
Show me where to look, tell me what will I find?
What will I find?
Lay me on the ground and fly me in the sky.
Show me where to look, tell me what will I find?
What will I find?
Oh, Heaven let your light shine down!

-- Collective Soul, "Shine" 1994

"Enlightenment" is one of many terms that refer to a higher, or some say even an ultimate, state of consciousness.[87] Others are "Cosmic Consciousness",[88] "Transcendence",[89] and "Spiritual Bliss". This grouping of terms is wholly mine and the exact meaning of these and similar words are subject to discussion. What I am getting at, however, is that many people, especially those who label themselves "spiritual seekers", have some desire for the attainment of a peak spiritual experience.

I once believed that when Buddha spoke of enlightenment, and Jesus preached of the Kingdom of Heaven, they were referring to a permanent, transcendent spiritual state. I believed that the "pearl of great price",[90] if I could find it, opened a doorway to eternal bliss. It has many names, but it is this peak experience to which I am referring.

I had one of those spiritual experiences, and it was real, and ineffable, but it was temporary. My experience was remarkably like the descriptions from others which I found after the fact.[91] It was a glimpse beyond the veil. But because I am human, I spent years afterward trying to understand it so I could recreate and make it permanent. I am astonished at my selfish, naive folly. It is the ego, not the soul, that seeks bliss.[92]

Before I continue, let me say that I am in no way minimizing or dismissing my experience. It was valid, real, and exactly what I needed at that time in my life. And although I had spent decades seeking such an experience, I do not believe it came about through my own efforts. It was indeed a gift from a benevolent universe.[93]

---

[87] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment_(spiritual)

[88] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_Consciousness

[89] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendence_(religion)

[90] Matthew 13:45-46

[91] William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", 1902; Richard Maurice Buck, "Cosmic Consciousness", 1901; Eckhart Tolle, "The Power of Now", 1999

[92] https://www.spiritualawakeningprocess.com/2015/06/lost-in-spiritual-bliss-reclaiming-your.html

[93] In "Comparing Religions", 2014, p286, Jeffrey J. Kripal introduces a term he calls the "traumatic secret." He proposes that intense spiritual experiences may be triggered by personal trauma. This ties in with ideas in "Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis", Edited by Stanislov and Christina Grof, 1989, as well as my own personal experience. Kripal goes on, however, to state that though trauma may sometimes be a necessary condition to a spiritual experience, it is never a sufficient condition. In other words, trauma more often "destroys, maims, and mangles." It does not automatically, and in fact, seldomly, produces a spiritual experience.

In time, I was able to put this experience in perspective. I realize now, even as I write, that perhaps this was a lesson I needed as much as any other. The desire for permanent bliss in this life is at best, escapist. Living in the physical plane, we are embedded in a reality that both defines and confines us. After all, the Buddha's solution to the suffering of existence is the Eightfold Path.[94] And, according to Jesus, the Greatest Commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and to love others as yourself.[95] Two of the greatest spiritual teachers in history tell us how to, not "bliss out",[96] but to live well as loving, ethical, compassionate human beings.

Extraordinary spiritual experiences are not only rare but seeking them may not be the best approach to spirituality. Better to accept them when they come and then get on with living. I had a counselor who once told me, "Don't come in here and tell me you got God." She was wiser than I knew.

Eckhart Tolle describes being in a state of bliss for nearly two years in which he had "no relationships, no job, no home, no socially defined identity."[97] We are meant for more than this. Saints and angels may be bathed in celestial light, but in this life, everyone must still pay the bills, do the laundry, and maintain relationships.

William James wrote of an "educational variety"[98] of religious experience[99] that is not instantaneous, but occurs over time. He describes it to be, "gradual if it occurs, and must resemble any simple growth into new habits." Further, he says, "the ultimate test of religious values is nothing psychological, nothing definable in terms of HOW IT HAPPENS, but something ethical, definable only in terms of WHAT IS ATTAINED."

I believe enlightenment, therefore, is not the subjective sensation of bliss or the attainment of a peak experience, although these may be side effects of it. It is, instead, personal growth through the development of ethics, character, and spirituality that shows itself in everyday life. It is an ongoing process.

This process occurs through living well, and can be achieved with persistence and diligence. Enlightenment lies, not so much in peak experiences, but in the quiet, persistent practice of becoming a better person, and making the world a better place. It comes about through life-long practice. It unfolds through the development of ethics, character, and spirituality that shows itself in the details of everyday life. The 12 Steps, Inner Focus, self-care, strong relationships, and simple virtues work together across the entire spectrum of life. It is not glamorous, but it is real and lasting.

It's easy to be a holy man on top of a mountain.

--"The Razor's Edge", 1984

---

[94] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_Eightfold_Path
[95] Matthew 22:35-40
[96] https://chrisdierkes.com/bliss/
[97] Eckhart Tolle, "The Power of Now", 1999
[98] This is how it is described in Appendix II of "Alcoholics Anonymous,", although I could not find that exact wording of the phrase in James' book.
[99] William James, "The Varieties of Religious Experience", 1902, Lect X

Know[3.6-31] The Afterlife

...send not to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.

--John Donne, "For Whom the Bell Tolls"

Well, I never been to Heaven, but I been to Oklahoma.

--Three Dog Night, "Never Been to Spain", 1971

An online quiz that assists you in defining your belief system has the question, "What happens to humans after death?"[100]

The [paraphrased] answers are:

1. Souls are judged, then punished or rewarded for eternity.
2. Souls sleep until the end times when the righteous go to paradise.
4. Spiritual development continues even after death.
5. Souls are reborn until spiritual lessons are learned.
6. There is an afterlife, but the specifics cannot be known.
7. There is no afterlife; no existence beyond death.
8. Not sure.
9. Not important.
10. None of the above.

Prior to putting much thought into it, however, it may be beneficial to first consider how you perceive this question. If you fear judgment and punishment for misdeeds done, then you believe in an afterlife. Perhaps, then, you only require sufficient courage to face this fact and determine to live rightly and well.

More likely, you fear uncertainty, as all humans do. To your brain, uncertainty equals danger and death.[101] Death, the "after-life", is the ultimate uncertainty. Fear of death, and the deep, instinctive need to avoid or deny it, has shaped many people's lives, decisions, and beliefs since humans developed an awareness of their own dissolution.

You will not find much comfort from materialistic science, which tells us that myths of the afterlife are the result of our "inability to grasp the end of our existence."[102] And "It's quite clear… that we're destined for rot and decay." The "tunnels of light" experienced in near death experiences (NDEs) are the result of abnormal cell activity in the visual cortex caused by lack of oxygen as the body dies. Euphoria, out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and visions are simply the hallucinations of a dying brain flooded by natural chemicals resembling ketamine and LSD.[103] Such a clinical description of the end we all face is neither helpful nor hopeful. These theories are espoused by materialists hoping to "debunk" a spiritual view of life and death.

---

[100] Spiritual Belief System Selector; http://www.selectsmart.com/RELIGION/

[101] Benjamin P. Hardy, "Personality Isn't Permanent: Break Free from Self-Limiting Beliefs and Rewrite Your Story", 2020, Blinkist Summary

[102] Peter Atkins, "On Being", 2011, Blinkist Summary

[103] Michael Shermer, Stephen J. Gould, "Why People Believe Weird Things", 2002, Blinkist Summary

And yet Carl Sagan, one of the most well-known scientists of the modern era, rejected the label of "atheist" for himself,[104] saying simply, "Why are you in such a hurry to make up your mind?" In his "Baloney Detection Kit", tool number 3 stated that "arguments from authority carry little weight" because authorities can make mistakes.[105]

Science is an excellent tool for investigating the physical universe. But I propose that scientific authorities have no say whatever in what may happen outside of it. You can read as many scientific opinions as you want that consciousness ends at death, but there is no evidence of that. Scientific instruments are physical devices and therefore useless for measuring that which is, by definition, "nonphysical". Scientists who state without qualification that there is no afterlife are expressing an opinion no more nor less valid than yours or mine.

Of course, if science cannot disprove an afterlife, the corollary is that neither can it prove it exists. This brings me to the next question which is, do you need such proof to live well, and if so, why? Again, the answer is most likely the discomfort caused by uncertainty. You can waste your life on the afterlife to resolve an unprovable uncertainty, or you can live now and let the inevitable unknowable take care of itself.

Questions concerning the afterlife and similar speculative questions are called "seeking" thoughts.[106] They are philosophical questions assumed to have an answer we can verbalize and understand. Yet they have no practical value. When you discuss the "afterlife", you use a word which you then demand to be defined. A word can only be defined in terms of what you already know. Since all we know is life, we define the afterlife in terms with which we are familiar: punished in flames, eternal happiness, or living in paradise. Such speculation does nothing to further your spiritual progress.

Orthodox religious proclamations of an afterlife carry no more weight than scientific denials of its existence. Jesus, himself, said in Matthew 8:22, "Let the dead bury their own dead." There are several interpretations of this verse,[107] but the gist of it is that your spiritual life right now takes precedence over concerns of death and dying.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk, explained it like this:[108]

Questioned one day about the problem of the infinity of the world, the Buddha said, 'Whether the world is finite or infinite, limited or unlimited, the problem of your liberation remains the same.' Life is so short. It must not be spent in endless metaphysical speculation that does not bring us any closer to the truth.

---

[104] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/achenblog/wp/2014/07/10/carl-sagan-denied-being-an-atheist-so-what-did-he-believe-part-1/

[105] The Baloney Detection Kit: Carl Sagan's Rules for Bullshit-Busting and Critical Thinking | Brain Pickings.org Sunday, December 20, 20155:25 PM

[106] Warren Archer, "I Think Therefore I Lie", 2019

[107] https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-questions-and-answers/what-does-matthew-822-mean-by-let-the-dead-bury-their
https://www.gotquestions.org/let-dead-bury-dead.html

[108] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Poisoned_Arrow

I realize when one faces the impending certainty of death (although, aren't we all?), philosophical discussion and dissecting language is of little help. When my time is undeniably near, perhaps I will be less detached. For many, contemplation of their final moments and what comes after is so terrifying that it must be denied at any cost. Reality does not go away just because you do not believe in it,[109] but a comforting word makes a difficult truth more palatable. Therefore, an upbeat tone is appropriate to end the section.

First, I provide you with a method for the contemplation of death to put your mortality in the proper perspective. Next, I will discuss death and the afterlife as a transformational journey. Last, I will briefly summarize some of the reasons you may expect an afterlife to exist.

Know[3.6-32] Memento Mori

It's been a wonderful, wonderful ride!

--Dave, AA Member

Contrary to what you may believe, contemplation of your own death not only makes logical sense but can lead to healthy behaviors while you still live.[110] The denial of death seems to me as unhealthy as dark fascination with it. We are physical beings. Whether you believe in an afterlife or not, you must accept that now you are here, and someday you will not be. Consideration of death can put your life into a psychological and temporal perspective you cannot otherwise achieve.

"Memento Mori" is a Latin phrase meaning, "Remember that you must die."[111] The intention of Memento Mori is to eliminate wasting the gift that is your life by accepting the transience of it.[112] If you are going to accomplish something in your life, you need to do it, or at least work toward it, now. A reminder of your own mortality is often necessary to awaken you from living "in the meantime"[113] until you discover, too late, that your life is ending.

There are many ways to practice Memento Mori and none of them contain a magical formula. There is no right or wrong way. We all die. We all know it. (If the idea of death fills you with excessive anxiety or depression, please seek professional help.)

The most practical way to begin is by putting your personal affairs in order. You are never too young to do this, and the process of doing so is a reminder of personal mortality which strikes close to home. If you die tomorrow, are your family, children, and partner taken care of? Do you have life insurance? No matter your economic status, you can still see to these matters.

---

[109] "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."
--Phillip K. Dick

[110] https://academyofideas.com/2018/01/
psychological-benefits-of-contemplating-death/

[111] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memento_mori

[112] https://buddhism.stackexchange.com/questions/14363/
how-do-i-do-contemplation-of-death-meditation-and-is-it-dangerous

[113] A quote from Arthur Schopenhauer, Collected Essays
https://academyofideas.com/2018/01/psychological-benefits-of-contemplating-death/

You may incorporate contemplation of death into your Inner Focus. Do not overdo it, a few minutes at a time is sufficient.[114] With each breath, say to yourself something like this, "Life is impermanent. Death is certain. I will not delay what must be done."

Another method is through reading and art. The "Danse Macabre", or "The Dance of Death" is an artistic representation of the universality of death dating from the Middle Ages.[115] Music lyrics from the same era provide a similar reminder:[116]

Life is short, and shortly it will end;
Death comes quickly and respects no one,
Death destroys everything and takes pity on no one.
To death we are hastening, let us refrain from sinning.
If you do not turn back and become like a child,
And change your life for the better,
You will not be able to enter, blessed, the Kingdom of God.
To death we are hastening, let us refrain from sinning.

Do not be put off by the wording but convert it to your own terms. The meaning is the same: "Death comes for us all. Live a good life." The essence of Memento Mori, then, is this: live well, find your purpose, and fulfill it.

Know[3.6-33] Epektasis

For a short while I was a member of a church that replaced the word "death" with "transition". The intention was to replace grieving with joy, as the passing of a loved one was not "dying", but "transitioning" to another plane. I found it awkward and discomforting in the aftermath of actual loss. The idea, however, is not without merit. Allowing for real grief after the passing of a loved one, thinking of death as a transition brings comfort.

Consider a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly. We see this as a wondrous change, but the caterpillar, could it entertain such thoughts, would more likely think of it in terms of dying. The caterpillar is gone, and yet continues into another existence. If we live in an infinite multiverse where every possibility is not only probable, but inevitable, then all variations of an afterlife would simply be the journey of consciousness through all that exists.

Epektasis is the idea that existence is unceasing evolution toward eternal happiness.[117] Developed by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 - 395),[118] It describes the soul's desire to be near God. As God is infinite, reaching a higher spiritual state brings happiness and the desire for further growth.[119]

---

[114] https://buddhism.stackexchange.com/questions/14363/how-do-i-do-contemplation-of-death-meditation-and-is-it-dangerous

[115] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danse_Macabre

[116] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memento_mori#Music

[117] Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia by Aletheia – Associação Científica e Cultural Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais de Braga, Praça da Faculdade, N.° 1, 4710-297, 2017

[118] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Nyssa

[119] https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/blog/epektasis-secret-happiness

By embedding life and death into a spectrum of infinite and eternal growth, Epektasis emphasizes every aspect of life.[120] It does not separate your spiritual life from your relationships and surroundings. Everything that you are, and that you are a part of, contributes to your never-ending transformation. This journey inspires hope, humility, a desire for spirituality, and a sense of the infinite in the world around you. This seems to me a beautifully healthy approach to life, as well as its end.

Know[3.6-34] Crossing the Styx

The river Styx, in Greek mythology, was the boundary between the world of the living and the dead.[121] It is an apt metaphor for crossing over from this life to whatever lies beyond. Stories of passing to another life are part of nearly all religious traditions. Surprisingly, these stories are remarkably similar across cultures and throughout history.[122] Even Neanderthal burial sites hint at similar beliefs, containing food and tools as though in preparation for a journey.[123]

Modern culture has replaced mythology and parables with studies of near-death experiences, visions, and reincarnation. The sheer number of these accounts is overwhelming. I believe that "there is probably an afterlife".[124]

A related issue is the question of an afterlife for animals. I recall, as a seven-year-old child, being asked who I wanted to see in heaven. I replied that I wanted to see my dog, Sam, who had been hit by a car and killed. A religious woman in a long black dress told me matter-of-factly that Sam will not be there, because animals do not have souls. At seven, I knew better. There is a case for animals in the afterlife.[125] What appeals to me is a Zen aphorism: "Can an animal be awakened? An insect? A blade of grass? This is a serious question. If you say yes or no, then you are sleeping."

There is no way of knowing if an afterlife actually exists.[126] I believe there is an afterlife of some kind, but we cannot know the nature of it. All we know is life. Certainly, an "after-" life must be radically different than anything we know or can imagine. Thus, we see the Buddha's wisdom in turning away from metaphysical speculation that wastes time and distracts from other matters. When the time comes, you will know if there is an afterlife.

You are not the lightening; you are the rain.
You are not the sky; you are the clouds.
You are not the fire; you are the smoke.
You are not the ocean; you are the waves.
You are not the dreamer; you are the dream.
--TA[127]

---

[120] https://www.epektasis.com.au/epektasis/
[121] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Styx
[122] Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Comparing Religions", 2014, p288
[123] Ibid. p277
[124] Greg Taylor, "Stop Worrying, There Probably is an Afterlife", 2013, Chap 1
[125] Shanahan, Niki Behrikis, "There is Eternal Life for Animals", 2002
[126] "Heaven and Hell, A History of the Afterlife", Bart D. Ehrman, 2021
[127] Inspired by Audioslave, "I Am the Highway", 2003

Spirit Conclusion

It is easy to understand how spiritual seeking can become the driving force behind a person's entire life. For many, the hunger for meaning and connection, and the desire to transcend suffering become overwhelming. I have felt it myself. The search for spiritual experience has dominated my thoughts, actions, and worldview for most of my life. There is no shame in this. Reaching for something beyond yourself is being human.

For some, this search becomes the centerpiece of their identity. They spend years, or even decades, seeking the next teacher, the next technique, the next experience. They hope it will finally deliver them to a state of lasting peace, enlightenment, and wholeness. For a few, this single-minded dedication bears fruit. But for most of us, the key to a good life is balance.

Spirit is one aspect of life. It is not meant to replace the others. You live in a body. You have a mind. You experience emotions. You have relationships. Ignoring any of these areas in the pursuit of spiritual experiences creates imbalance, disillusionment, or even harm. The same can be said of those who ignore spirit, and focus only on material success or comfort. Life is best approached holistically, with all its parts respected and nurtured.

Throughout this section, I have shared what I have learned, through study and personal practice. My path has been one of trial, error, and gradual acceptance. I know now that there is no finish line, no moment when I can finally say, "I have arrived." There is only the day I am given, and the opportunity to connect with my Higher Power.

Spirit matters. It deserves your attention and care. But it is most powerful when it flows out of, and into, every part of your life. When your spiritual practice supports your life, then your life supports your spiritual practice. In the end, spirituality is not a place you reach. It is the way you live.

He had a different idea, you might have heard His name
He gave us all a new vision, not looking for fortune or fame
His works were a wonder to speak of, His thoughts on another plane
The words that He said were a mystery, no one was sure He was sane.

But He knew, He knew more than me or you
No one could see His view, oh, where was He going to?
And He knew, you could tell by the picture He drew
It was totally something new, oh, where was He going to?

He said that He was the answer, the only one near or far
He was trying to show us a new way, He was bright as a star
But nobody understood Him, they said He was not the way
They were lost in the deepest enigma, that few have unraveled today.

--Kerry Livgren, "Portrait II", 1988

3.7 Relationships

Ask why you are here, what is the point and purpose of life, and, most importantly, what makes you happy in life? And what you will inevitably find out is that the point and purpose of life, the reason you are here, the true one and only sole source of happiness is... other people. [But] only a select handful of them…will provide you with nearly all of your happiness, fun, love, joy and purpose in life.

--Aaron Clarey

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.

--Anne Frank

Relationships Contents

1. About Relationships 425
2. Truths About Relationships 426
3. Your Relationship with Your Higher Power 427
4. Your Relationship with Yourself 428
5. Your Relationship with Others 436
6. RaDaR in Relationships 447
7. Ethics 448

Know[3.7-01] **About Relationships**

There are three points of connection. We must connect to our earthed and ordinary self, a fundamental self-awareness. We equally require a connection to a Higher Self, a quiet, ever-present awareness within, that some may call God. But we must also connect with others. --Russell Brand, "Recovery: Freedom from Addiction"

Relationships are the very essence of what it means to be human. In one way or another, they tie together all of your earthly experiences. You have three levels of relationships:

With your Higher Power.
With yourself.
With others.

Each of these relationships plays a pivotal role in shaping who you are and how you experience the world around you. Your connection with your Higher Power provides guidance, strength, and purpose. It is a source of spiritual nourishment and direction.

Your relationship with yourself sets the foundation for all other connections. It includes self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-love. This relationship determines how you perceive yourself and how you interact with the world.

3.7 Relationships

Your relationships with others are the threads that weave the fabric of your life. These are your friends, family, co-workers, and like-minded individuals. They bring joy, companionship, and support. They also challenge you, helping you grow and evolve as an individual. Others may also include pets, your society, nation, the global community, and the natural, physical world.

Understanding and nurturing these three levels of relationships is key to leading a fulfilling and balanced life. They are intertwined. Each influences the others. Together, they weave the tapestry of your entire human experience. All are equally important.

Know[3.7-02] **Truths About Relationships**

The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart.

--Blaise Pascal

1. Be genuine and true to yourself in relationships.[1] Authenticity builds trust and allows for genuine intimacy. When you show up as your true self, you attract people who appreciate you for who you are.

My inside and my outside match today.

--Merilee, AA Member

2. Open and honest communication is the foundation of healthy relationships.[2] Express your thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly and respectfully. Listen to others actively and with empathy.

3. Set clear boundaries to protect your well-being.[3] Boundaries define acceptable behavior and ensure that your needs are respected. Healthy boundaries promote mutual respect and prevent resentment.

4. Empathy builds compassion, connection, and deeper intimacy.[4] Empathizing creates a mutually supportive and nurturing environment.

5. Trust is the foundation of any meaningful relationship.[5] Trust takes time to develop but can be easily broken. Honor your commitments and be transparent and truthful in your actions and words.

6. Conflict is a natural part of any relationship and provides opportunities for growth and understanding.[6] Approach conflicts with a willingness to find mutually beneficial solutions. Think "win-win" instead of "either-or."

---

[1] https://www.apa.org/topics/marriage-relationships/healthy-relationships

[2] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/202107/10-ways-keep-relationship-going-strong

[3] https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/setting-healthy-boundaries-in-relationships.htm

[4] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/202107/10-ways-keep-relationship-going-strong

[5] https://www.enotalone.com/article/relationships/what-is-relationship-advice-5-rules-r11238/

[6] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/202107/10-ways-keep-relationship-going-strong

7. Respect is the cornerstone of healthy relationships.[7] Treat others with kindness, dignity, and consideration. Respect boundaries, opinions, and autonomy.

8. Compromise is important for resolving differences and finding common ground.[8] Be willing to make concessions and find solutions that honor your needs and those of others.

9. Prioritize self-care to maintain balance and well-being.[9] Take care of your physical, emotional, and mental health. Set aside time for activities that replenish and rejuvenate you.

10. Love is more than just a feeling; it is a conscious choice and action.[10] Show love through kindness, compassion, and support. This requires consistent effort and commitment.

Know[3.7-03] **Your Relationship with Your Higher Power**[11]

Only you can decide the nature and depth of your connection with your Higher Power, because it is personal and unique to you. It is completely natural; you are born with it. It is a free gift to you.

> *But the word is very near to you, in your mouth*
> *and in your heart, that you may do it.*
>
> --Deuteronomy 30:14, WEB

Regardless of how you realize this sacred relationship, keep it personal. It is yours and only yours. While social connections and ritual practices may enhance it, remember that it is intimate and exclusive between you and your Higher Power. Do not give this connection away, nor let it be coopted or taken from you. "Call no man father except your Father in heaven."[12]

Do not be afraid to question and refine your beliefs. Your relationship to your Higher Power is yours, and yours alone. Guard it fiercely. Stay true to your convictions and values. Accept the journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth, knowing that your relationship with your Higher Power is a deeply personal and profound experience.

This relationship is, and must be, the framework for every other relationship. Whether based on evidence or faith, experience or teachings from your childhood, keep it first in all things. The divine spark within you is the Alpha and Omega[13] of all purpose and meaning. (See Step 2 p. 63; Step 2 ½ p. 71; Spirit p. 385)

---

[7] https://www.enotalone.com/article/relationships/what-is-relationship-advice-5-rules-r11238/

[8] https://www.verywellmind.com/compromise-in-relationships-7559559#:~:text=Compromise%20entails%20a%20mutual%20respect,adjustments%20to%20accommodate%20each%20other.

[9] https://thriveworks.com/blog/relationship-self-care-tips-prioritizing-yourself/

[10] https://psychcentral.com/relationships/love-is-a-choice-more-than-a-feeling

[11] Based in part, on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35fUsXT05Xw&ab_channel=MythVisionPodcast and "Inner Anarchy" by Jim Palmer

[12] Matthew 23:9

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_and_Omega

3.7 Relationships

Your Relationship with Yourself

Know thyself.

--Inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

You can use the ego states of Transactional Analysis,[14] "parts" from Internal Family Systems,[15] and Jung's shadow self[16] as possible ways to understand and develop a better relationship with yourself. Each of these models give you separate clues and understanding about yourself.

Know[3.7-04] Ego States from Transactional Analysis[17]

Parent: You often mirror parental figures you learned from unconsciously in childhood. These may be parents, guardians, teachers, or even fictional characters.[18] The Parent ego state may be nurturing or critical.

Adult: Your ego operates in a rational state where you look at the facts and make appropriate decisions. In the Adult state, you are operating in the present, free of the influence of your Parent or Child states.[19]

Child: This state mirrors *your* childhood behaviors in your current situation. Some of these reactions may be fragmented parts of your personality,[20] or result from unconscious memories.[21] This state may be natural or adapted.

These ego states are neural pathways that physically exist in your brain.[22] You slide in and out of these states without realizing it. They may be incredibly complex, nested within each other[23] like Matryoshka dolls.

One way to recognize what ego state you are currently in is by examining descriptive adjectives that may be applied to each state.[24] By paying attention to how you or someone close would describe your mood and behavior, you can get a clue as to which ego state you are in.

---

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transactional_analysis#Ego-state_or_Parent%E2%80%93Adult%E2%80%93Child_(PAC)_models

[15] Jay Early, PhD, "Self-Therapy", 2009

[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_(psychology)

[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transactional_analysis#Ego-state_or_Parent%E2%80%93Adult%E2%80%93Child_(PAC)_models

[18] https://counsellingtutor.com/counselling-approaches/transactional-analysis/what-are-ego-states/

[19] https://counsellingtutor.com/counselling-approaches/transactional-analysis/what-are-ego-states/

[20] Don Carter, MSW, LCSW, "Thawing Adult/Child Syndrome and Other Codependent Patterns", 1995-2012, Kindle location 1493

[21] https://counsellingtutor.com/counselling-approaches/transactional-analysis/what-are-ego-states/

[22] Don Carter, MSW, LCSW, "Thawing Adult/Child Syndrome and Other Codependent Patterns", 1995-2012, Kindle location 1433, 1446, 1526, and others

[23] Don Carter, MSW, LCSW, "Thawing Adult/Child Syndrome and Other Codependent Patterns", 1995-2012, Kindle location 1593

[24] Kathryn B. Williams, John E. Williams, "The Assessment of Transactional Analysis Ego States Via the Adjective Checklist", from "Journal of Personality Assessment", 1980,44,2

Critical Parent: autocratic, bossy, demanding, dominant, fault finding, forceful, intolerant, nagging, opinionated, prejudiced, rigid, severe, stern

Nurturing Parent: affectionate, considerate, forgiving, gentle, helpful, kind, praising, sympathetic, tolerant, understanding, unselfish, warm

Adult: alert, capable, clear-thinking, efficient, fair-minded, logical, methodical, organized, precise, rational, realistic, reasonable, unemotional

Free Child: adventurous, affectionate, artistic, energetic, enthusiastic, excitable, humorous, imaginative, natural, spontaneous, uninhibited

Adapted Child: anxious, apathetic, argumentative, arrogant, awkward, complaining, confused, defensive, dependent, hurried, inhibited, moody

Practice: Journal about times when you noticed your Parent, Adult, and Child ego states being activated. Reflect on how each ego state influences your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Know[3.7-05] Parts of Self

A model I find helpful describes personality in terms of "parts", sub-personalities with their own desires, fears, and interactions.[25] Understanding and integrating these parts can lead to greater self-awareness and balance.

You are *always only one* person,[26] but you can have many different parts, and types of parts. These can include inner critics, an inner child or children, different kinds of protectors, and parts of yourself that you do not want to feel or acknowledge. Your "inner family" might include "a lonely baby, a wise mentor, an angry child, a stern mother, a calm meditator, a magician, a happy animal, a closed-off protector, and so on."[27]

Two special types of parts are called "protectors" and "exiles". These are parts that were hurt/neglected (exiles), or formed to protect them (protectors). When extreme, they can cause dysfunctional behavior and relationship issues.

There is another part of yourself called, aptly, "Self."[28] This is the part of you that is real, authentic, and the basic foundation of who you are. When none of your other parts are activated, Self is what is left. I think of it as being somewhat like the Adult ego state.

And, I believe that even your Higher Power can be found within you! (This is my own idea, and not connected to any of the psychological models I have referenced.) Jesus said, "…the Kingdom of God is within you (or 'in your midst')".[29] Jesus was human and divine. The demi-gods of mythology were both human and godlike. I believe that your Higher Power, whatever its cosmic extent, is also part of your human existence. It is "within you".

---

[25] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_Family_Systems_Model

[26] Margaret Paul PhD, "Inner Bonding", pp24-25

[27] Jay Early, PhD, "Self-Therapy", 2009, p5

[28] Jay Early, PhD, "Self-Therapy", 2009, p25

[29] Luke 17:21

Practice: Before you begin, I would like to add a word of caution. When I did an exercise similar to this with ego states, my "angry child" was not a cute 8-year-old throwing a tantrum, but a terrifying abomination enflamed by years of murderous rage. It was so daunting that my other "parts" would not look at, or even acknowledge it. I described it in a whisper as I looked at the floor in front of me. I still remember the shock, and fear (and yes, love, because it had protected me all my life) of having such a twisted, angry monstrosity as part of me. Fortunately, I was with a competent, experienced therapist in a safe and controlled environment.

My point is, if you have undergone significant pain and trauma, it may have resulted in incredibly powerful or unstable personality parts.[30] This work may evoke intense reactions like panic, depression, or physical symptoms. It could trigger addictive or risky behaviors, confusion, or disorientation. If you experience these, stop and seek professional help.

Know[3.7-06] Accessing Parts of Your Personality[31]

When doing this exercise, keep these points in mind:

ALL of your parts are trying to help you in some way.
Do not try to rid yourself of parts you do not like.
Accept, love, and nurture all of your parts.

Grounding: Find a quiet and comfortable space where you can relax and focus inwardly. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to center yourself. Notice any physical sensations, emotions, or thoughts that arise in the present moment. Be in Self. That is, be calm, curious, and accepting of whatever you may discover or learn.

Inner Dialogue: Begin by asking yourself a question like, "What part of me is feeling anxious right now?" or "What part of me is seeking validation?" Or, call to mind a situation where you acted out or were not "yourself". Ask the part that was activated in that situation to come out for a visit. Be kind, patient, and calm. Listen for any responses that come to mind, or might indicate that a part is willing to introduce itself.

Visualize: Once you have identified a part, visualize it as if it were a separate being. Allow it to take form, have its own voice, and demonstrate those characteristics that feel true to its nature. Look around, and invite the part to take a seat near you. You want to answer these questions:[32]

Name of the part.
What it feels emotionally.
What it looks like.
What it feels like in your body and where.
What it says.
How it makes you behave.
What it wants.

---

[30] Jay Early, PhD, "Self-Therapy", 2009, p14-15
[31] Based on: Jay Early, PhD, "Self-Therapy", 2009, Chap 3
[32] Jay Early, PhD, "Self-Therapy", 2009, p55

Dialogue: Engage in a dialogue with the part. Ask questions like, "What do you need?" or "What role do you play in my life?" or "How are you trying to help or protect me?" Listen to its responses without judgment.

Express: Allow the part to express itself fully. This could involve journaling, drawing, or simply verbalizing its thoughts and feelings.

Integration: Finally, thank the part for sharing and reassure it that you are here to listen and understand. Explore ways to integrate its needs and concerns into your overall sense of self.

Summary: Approach this process with curiosity, compassion, and an open mind. It may take time to develop a deeper connection with your parts, so be patient and gentle with yourself as you explore. The more often you practice this exercise, the better your results will be.

Know[3.7-07] Nurturing Your Inner Child:

Loving myself more does not mean I love my family less.

--Heather, AA Member [Paraphrased]

The discovery of the inner child is really the discovery of a portal to the soul. A spirituality that is not grounded in the understanding, experience, and an appreciation of the inner child can move people away from their simple humanity too easily. The inner child keeps us human. It never grows up, it only becomes more sensitive and trusting as we learn how to give it the time, care, and parenting it so richly deserves.

--[From] Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D. "Recovery of Your Inner Child"

One of the parts you probably lost touch with is your inner child. You can nurture that part of yourself as an adult. It requires validating the emotions and needs from your childhood experiences. You can provide the love, care, and support that may have been lacking in the past. You can literally "re-parent" yourself.[33] This nurturing relationship allows you to heal old wounds, develop self-compassion, and become a more authentic person.

You heal your inner child by recognizing and meeting its needs. You may have unresolved childhood needs for love and safety. The lack of these could have triggered anxiety, fear, shame, and anger. Unaddressed, these emotions affect you for the rest of your life. Persistent emotional issues in adulthood means your inner child needs your attention and care.

Begin by setting the intention to reconnect with your inner child.[34] This could involve finding a quiet and comfortable space where you feel relaxed and open to exploring your emotions. Think about what it feels like to be a loving Adult to your inner Child. You want to be: loving, connected, willing, open, and have a sincere desire to learn.[35]

---

[33] Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D., "Recovery of Your Inner Child", 1988, p24

[34] https://growtherapy.com/blog/powerful-methods-to-heal-your-inner-child/#techniques-for-healing-your-inner-child

[35] Margaret Paul PhD, "Inner Bonding", pp26-27

Take some time to reflect on your childhood memories and your current life experiences. Think about moments that brought you joy, innocence, and wonder.[36] Carefully consider those memories, also, of pain, disappointment, and fear. Connect those unresolved emotions or experiences from your past that may still affect you today.[37]

In the following examples, when writing or drawing as your inner child, try using your nondominant hand (NDH) (if you are right-handed, use your left hand, and vice-versa). Using your nondominant hand can bypass your critical faculties and put you more in touch with your inner child.[38]

Know[3.7-08] Write letters to and from your inner child to build trust and enable healing.[39] Use a nurturing tone to create a safe space for expression, gain insight into their needs, and process past pain. Try writing as your inner child with your nondominant hand for deeper connection.

Know[3.7-09] Express your feelings by painting or drawing images that reflect your inner child, emotions, or childhood memories.[40] Use bright, playful colors and symbols without self-judgment, using your nondominant hand. Do a 30-day challenge with one drawing each day.[41]

Know[3.7-10] Write a dialog on paper:[42] use your dominant hand for your questions or statements, and your nondominant hand to write your inner child's replies.[43] Tune into your feelings, imagining your very young inner child. By integrating your child-like vulnerability with your adult mind, you can uncover the roots of your pain and desires for positive changes.

Know[3.7-11] Visualize a conversation.[44] I found this method to be particularly effective to communicate with ego-states, my Higher Power, inner child, and others. To use visualization (See "Invisible Counselors" p. 411):

Decide who you want to talk to, in this case, your inner child. But you can also request conversations with your Higher Power, your Parent, Adult, Shadow Self, or any other part. Maintain a supportive, and curious attitude.

Have an imagined, or actual physical location, where your parts can come out and sit or stand. As to how and where they enter the room, leave that to them. I was surprised, for example, that when I first tried this exercise in my home office, everyone came out of the storage closet.

---

[36] John Bradshaw, "Homecoming: Reclaiming and…", Chap 2

[37] John Bradshaw, "Homecoming: Reclaiming and…", Chap 1

[38] Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D., "Recovery of Your Inner Child", 1988, p32

[39] https://cptsdfoundation.org/2020/07/20/healing-trauma-through-inner-child-work/

[40] Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D., "Recovery of Your Inner Child", 1988, p32

[41] https://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/expressive-art-e-courses/30-day-expressive-drawing-challenges/inner-child-drawings/

[42] Margaret Paul PhD, "Inner Bonding", p34

[43] Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D., "Recovery of Your Inner Child", 1988, p32

[44] Based on the ego-state visualization exercise: Don Carter, MSW, LCSW, "Thawing Adult/Child Syndrome and Other Codependent Patterns", 1995-2012, Kindle location 3617

When a part, like your inner child, appears, observe its look, expression, and your feelings toward it. Ask how it feels about being there. Invite other parts, even if some are hesitant or quiet. You may notice gender differences or hidden aspects, as everyone has both masculine and feminine sides and some parts may be suppressed. If visualization is difficult, it may indicate a disowned part; engage gently without forcing.

Ask each part if it wants a name to deepen connection and validation. With practice, these parts may interact independently, revealing surprising dynamics. Journal these experiences, noting who was present, their feelings, relationships, and needs, for insight and integration.

Be Imperfect: The goal is not perfection but rather self-expression and emotional healing. Accept imperfections in your artwork and writing, as they can add depth and authenticity to your creation.

Reflect and Reconnect: Take time to reflect on your letter, dialog, or artwork. Notice any emotions that arise and allow yourself to fully experience them. Reconnect with your inner child with self-compassion and acceptance.

Practice Often: Reconnecting is an ongoing process. Revisit this practice when you feel disconnected or in need of nurturing your inner child.

Know[3.7-12] Embracing Your Shadow Self

What you resist, persists.

--[Attributed to] Carl Jung

Your shadow self contains the unconscious aspects of your personality that you may reject or suppress.[45] They are the traits, desires, and emotions that you deem unacceptable or undesirable. By acknowledging and integrating your shadow self, you reclaim lost parts of your identity. This brings self-acceptance, authenticity, and inner peace.

But remember, you have rejected your shadow self for a reason, perhaps for many reasons. These are the parts of yourself that you do not like, or fear. To you, they are unacceptable, detestable, weak, disgusting, or shameful. It is unlikely that you will simply open your arms and welcome your shadow self like a lost child. You avoided doing so all your life.

Exploring your shadow self can be upsetting. The first time I did these exercises, I was nearly overwhelmed by a crushing wave of depression. I realized how much of my life, emotion, energy, and relationships I had disowned or projected onto other people *for my entire life.* Be careful; if you need help to find your way, get help.

Shadow work involves using an interesting psychological phenomenon called "projection", "where feelings directed towards the self are displaced towards other people."[46] You can use projection like a mirror to see your shadow self, much as Perseus used a polished shield to view Medusa safely.[47]

---

[45] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_(psychology)
[46] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_projection
[47] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseus#Overcoming_Medusa

Notice the qualities in others that irritate or anger you; often, these reflect traits within yourself that you have not fully acknowledged.[48] For example, a person's behavior may be rude, but if you have a strong reaction, it may suggest discomfort with your own capacity for rudeness.

The difference is that of being informed or affected.[49] If someone is rude to you and you think, "They must be having a bad day," then you are informed. However, if you think to yourself, "That SOB has the nerve to be rude to me and I did not do anything to them!" then you are affected, and probably had a reaction from your shadow self. This does not mean you must tolerate unacceptable behavior, but it shows you where your reaction originates.

Projection happens unconsciously as your ego defends your ideal self-image by disowning undesirable traits and placing them onto others. You may also project unmet needs outward, seeking validation or completion from others, which leads to dependency and prevents you from addressing your needs directly and growing authentically.

Validation is approval from others. Self-esteem is approval from yourself. Never sacrifice your self-esteem to gain validation. Validation is easily regained… Self-esteem is not.

--Mark Manson

Projection distorts your view of reality, disconnecting you from your true self. Recognizing this tendency develops a more authentic, integrated self-understanding, leads to greater empathy and maturity, and avoids placing unfair burdens or expectations onto others.

Know[3.7-13] The 3-2-1 Shadow Process[50]

Your shadow self was once part of you. That is, you would address it as, "I am… (afraid, angry, hurt, and so on)". But by rejecting any part of yourself, you make of it an "other". You can then reject it, hate it, or project it onto other people. So, part of you goes from being first person ("I") to third person ("it", "that"). Reversing this process re-integrates those parts that you split off. The "3-2-1" refers to third-person ("it"), second-person ("you"), and first-person ("I") interaction and perception of the cast-off part.

Shadow disturbances can be positive or negative, causing reactions like irritation, hurt, or anger, or leading to idealization, infatuation, possessiveness, or obsession. This splitting off of a part you do not accept in yourself can result in irrational dislike of someone or, conversely, idealizing another as a "magical other" to avoid feelings of disconnection.

Start by selecting someone to focus on, such as a person you are repulsed by, or someone you "put on a pedestal." While that person may have real faults or be truly good, remember "inform or affect". Your Shadow Self reacts strongly to qualities or needs in yourself that are hard to accept.

---

[48] Scott Jeffrey, "A Complete Guide to Working with Your Shadow"

[49] Ken Wilber, "The Spectrum of Consciousness", Chap 10

[50] Ken Wilber, et al, "Integral Life Practice",pp66-74

Then follow the 3 steps of the process:

3. Describe it: Examine the disturbance closely, then journal or use an empty chair to vividly describe the person, situation, or sensation in third-person terms. Examine what bothers or attracts you without downplaying anything.

2. Talk to It: Have a simulated conversation with the disturbance using second-person pronouns, directly addressing it with questions like, "Who are you? What do you want from me? What insight do you bring?" Then, imagine its responses and record them, staying open to unexpected answers.

1. Be It/Own It:[51] Fully immerse yourself by adopting the disturbance's perspective, using first-person pronouns like "I" and "me." Acknowledge it as part of you by stating "I am…" or "…is me," despite discomfort. Owning it integrates the shadow on all levels, giving you new freedom and peace.

Example: Rudeness

3. Describe It: Examine the person you label as "rude." What exactly triggers this label, tone, gestures, interruptions? Note examples that stand out.

2. Talk to It: Have a simulated conversation with them. Ask, "Why are you rude?" "What about you bothers me?" "Do you see your impact on others?" Let them answer honestly in your mind.

1. Be It/Own It: Recognize and accept that you can also be rude at times. Feel any discomfort this brings, and embrace it with self-compassion and understanding, despite any discomfort.

Example: Seeking Validation

3. Describe It: Visualize the person you seek validation from. Are they powerful, attractive, confident, or influential? Note their demeanor, appearance, and what emotions they evoke in you. Reflect on why their validation matters and which traits you admire.

2. Talk to It: Have a simulated conversation. Admit your need for their validation and ask why. Explore which of their traits fulfill needs in you and how their approval affects you. Imagine how you feel if they validate you, and if they do not, and why.

1. Be It/Own It: Recognize and accept your reliance on external validation at times. Feel the discomfort and vulnerability this brings, and embrace it with self-awareness to support your growth.

You can do the 3-2-1 process any time you need it. It only takes a few minutes for anything that is disturbing you. For extended shadow work, consider a longer weekly session for thorough healing and re-integration.[52]

---

[51] I added "Own It" to the original "Be It"

[52] https://integrallife.com/the-3-2-1-shadow-process/

Your Relationship with Others

It is necessary that we extricate from an examination of our personal relations every bit of information about ourselves and our fundamental difficulties that we can. Since defective relations with other human beings have nearly always been the immediate cause of our woes… no field of investigation could yield more satisfying and valuable rewards than this one. Calm, thoughtful reflection upon personal relations can deepen our insight. We can go far beyond those things which were superficially wrong with us, to see those flaws which were basic, flaws which sometimes were responsible for the whole pattern of our lives.

--Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p80

Relationships are constant negotiations between two imperfect people.[53] You can learn a great deal about yourself through your attitudes toward and interactions with others. In your thoughts and conversations, stay aware of how you see yourself in relation to other people.

Know[3.7-14] Four Life Positions: Your Relationships with Others[54]

I'm OK and you're OK. This is the healthiest position about relationships and it means that you feel good about yourself and others.

I'm OK and you're not OK. You feel good about yourself but you see others as damaged or less than yourself. This is usually not healthy.

I'm not OK and you're OK. In this position you see yourself as the weak partner in relationships. You will unconsciously accept abuse as OK.

I'm not OK and you're not OK. You believe you are in a terrible state and the rest of the world is as bad. Consequently, there is no hope for the future.

To increase awareness of your life position and initiate change:[55]

Awareness: simply checking your internal state while in conversation, relating to, or even thinking about another person can tell you your position in relation to them.

Conscious Effort: with patient practice, it is possible to gradually change your life position for better relationships.

Therapy: Work with a therapist to develop healthier life positions.

Results of Social Isolation[56]

I'm fine alone, it's loneliness I don't do well.

--Mitch, AA Member

Extroverts charge their batteries being with other people,
introverts charge their batteries being alone. --Matt, AA Member

---

[53] Edited from bard.google.com

[54] Thomas A. Harris, MD, "I'm OK, You're OK", pp38-44

[55] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxiWpT_SaFc&ab_channel=LewisPsychology

[56] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7_qmkmP-JM&list=WL&index=1

Your brain requires social interaction to maintain optimal function. Social isolation causes physical changes and damage to the brain. Without sufficient social engagement, nerve connections in areas like the temporal lobes, frontal lobes, and hippocampus become less efficient at transmitting signals. This impairs cognitive abilities, word recall, and mental endurance.

Social isolation undermines your social cognition skills, the set of skills that allow you to interpret facial expressions, recognize familiar people, understand tone of voice, empathize with others' perspectives, and attribute mental states to others. These skills are developed early in life but require continuous practice through social interaction to maintain proficiency.

Those who are socially isolated exhibit measurable brain loss and atrophy in critical regions like the hippocampus, which plays an important role in encoding emotional memories. This brain degeneration accelerates age-related cognitive decline and increases risk for Alzheimer's disease. The impact is not limited to older adults, younger people who experience extreme social deprivation report symptoms like brain fog and other conditions.

Know[3.7-15] Circles of Relationships

It is not anybody's job to love me, it is my job to love myself and give that love away freely with no strings attached.

--Kattie, AA Member

Relationships suck.

--Brooke, AA Member

The Circles of Relationships refer to the different levels of closeness and intimacy you have with others in your life. These circles can be visualized as concentric circles, with the innermost circle representing the closest and most intimate relationships, and the outer circles representing more distant or casual relationships.

On a piece of paper, draw several concentric circles. At the center circle, write "Self". Moving outward, write the names of all the people in your life. (See Circles of Relationships p. 796)

Next is your Support Network. Identify individuals who provide emotional, practical, or other forms of support. This could include intimate partners, close friends, family members, therapists, or support groups. Always know who is in your support network, and choose them carefully:[57]

People who want you to succeed.
People who have experienced what you are going through.
People with different skill sets and backgrounds.
People who can and are willing to mentor you.
People who will be honest with you.

---

[57] https://mbimybigidea.com/2021/09/15/5-types-of-people-you-need-in-your-support-network/

Exclude these people from your support network:

People who bring you down.
People who are untrustworthy.
People who enable your shortcomings.[58]

After you know your Support Network, continue filling in the rest:

Intimate Relationships: romantic partnerships, close friendships, or other deep connections marked by emotional intimacy and vulnerability.

Family: parents, siblings, extended family, and chosen family members.

Friends: can be divided based on closeness, interests, or shared experiences. Analyze friendships that provide companionship and shared activities. Know who your real friends are. There is a difference between friends and acquaintances.

Coworkers: professional relationships with colleagues, superiors, and subordinates.

Peripheral Relationships: casual acquaintances, neighbors, community members, and others who form the outer layer of your social sphere.

Extended Others: While writing this section I lost a beloved pet. I watched the light fade from her eyes, and then she was gone. The seven years she shared with me passed "like a warm summer day."[59] I miss her terribly.

Your relationships with pets often tell you more about yourself than your interactions with people. While they may be a small part of your life, you are their entire universe. Your treatment of them clearly reflects who you are.

Beyond pets are more "others". There is a web of relationships that ties you to the entire universe. Did you know, for example, that the molecules in your body were formed in the heart of a star? You are, quite literally, stardust.[60]

And, while humans are mostly insulated from the natural world by asphalt, concrete, and steel, you are still part of it. Every breath you take is part of Caesar's last breath, 2000 years ago.[61] The blood in your veins resembles the waters of ancient, primordial oceans.[62] You share 99.9% of your DNA with other humans, 50% with trees, and 25% with daffodils.[63]

You need not tilt at windmills,[64] but take an interest in this world, and the infinite skies above and below it. It is your world, after all. Take care of it.

---

[58] I added this one because it seems obvious

[59] My tiny memorial to my sweet kitty Roxanne, a shelter rescue for whom I tried only to give a good life; an effort for her as well as for myself. I believe I was successful. Quote from Bad Company, "Shooting Star", 1975

[60] https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/are-we-really-made-of-stardust.html

[61] https://www.sciencenews.org/article/every-breath-you-take-contains-molecule-history

[62] Gaspar Banfalvi, "Evolution of Osmolyte Systems" https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/0307-4412%2891%2990055-D

[63] https://thednatests.com/how-much-dna-do-humans-share-with-other-animals/

[64] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Quixote#Tilting_at_windmills

3.7 Relationships

Building and Maintaining Relationships

I can ask God to work through me, but the other person has to show up, too.

--Stephanie, AA Member

The key to creating and keeping relationships is to sincerely care about the people around you. Show genuine interest in their lives, listen attentively, and be there for them. Stay in touch through regular check-ins, quality time, or small gestures that let them know you are thinking of them. Strong relationships are built on trust, empathy, and mutual respect. When you prioritize the needs and feelings of others, you will make lasting connections that enrich your life.

Issues are complex, and so are human beings.

--Kat Timpf

Know[3.7-16] Building and keeping healthy relationships:[65,66]

Do not criticize or complain; avoid negativity toward others.
Express sincere appreciation and gratitude.
Take genuine interest in others' perspectives and experiences.
Smile; it creates a welcoming, positive atmosphere.
Remember and use people's names to show respect.
Be an active listener; encourage others to share about themselves.
Discuss topics of interest to the other person.
Make others feel valued and important.
Avoid arguments; seek common ground instead.
Respect others' opinions, even if you disagree.
Admit mistakes with humility when wrong.
Begin interactions in a friendly manner.
Let the other person do most of the talking.
Strive to see things from the other's point of view.
Show empathy for others' ideas and desires.
Keep a warm and friendly attitude toward others.
Do unexpected favors for people.
Offer genuine compliments and praise.
Keep your word and never make promises you cannot keep.
Treat work associates as friends, not just acquaintances.
Build a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness.
Arrive at work with a smile, leaving personal troubles behind.
Never use your position for personal gain at others' expense.
Treat everyone equally without playing favorites.
Respect every person's dignity.
Be sincere; mean what you say and say what you mean.
Practice the Golden Rule with everyone.
Uphold a strong belief in the rights of others.
Show genuine interest in others' welfare.
Treat everyone with courtesy.

---

[65] Dale Carnegie, "How to Win Friends and Influence People", 1936
[66] James K. Van Fleet, "Lifetime Conversation Guide", 1984

Close Relationships[67]

In close relationships, behavior is better understood as part of ongoing interaction patterns rather than simple cause and effect. Each person's actions influence and shape the other in a continuous loop. A relationship is not just two separate individuals but a dynamic whole, each person is both an individual and an integral part of the bond they share. Emotional struggles often reflect issues within the relationship itself, not just within one partner.

The quality of the bond in close relationships influences the wellbeing of everyone involved. Within relationships, each person plays roles. Participants model how to express feelings, share desires, and support each other's growth, while remaining open to learning themselves. Healthy relationships maintain flexible roles, while rigid ones signal dysfunction.

Every relationship has spoken and unspoken rules governing how they are conducted, how tasks are shared, how privacy is respected, and how money, celebrations, and boundaries are handled. A tension exists between individuality and togetherness; the need to be your own person sometimes clashes with the need to fit into the relationship's shared life.

Relationships seek equilibrium. If one partner is often angry, the other may become quiet and accommodating to keep balance. This system can be open and adaptive or closed and rigid. Finally, relationships have core needs: practical support like shared responsibilities, emotional maintenance through affection and warmth, connection and intimacy, opportunities for personal growth, shared excitement and fun, and a sense of unity and belonging.

Know[3.7-17] Intimate Relationships: Five Love Languages[68]

When you identify your partner's primary love language and express love in ways that mean something *to them*, you deepen your bond.

Words of Affirmation: If this is your partner's love language, you express love by offering verbal compliments, appreciation, and encouragement.

Acts of Service: For a partner who values acts of service, you show love by thoughtfully doing tasks and gestures that help meet their needs.

Receiving Gifts: If receiving gifts is their primary love language, you express love by giving meaningful, thoughtful gifts that show you consider their interests.

Quality Time: When quality time is important, you invest time into sharing experiences and having undivided attention for connecting.

Physical Touch: If physical touch is their love language, you convey love and affection through physical gestures like hugs, kisses, cuddling, and intimacy.

Understanding each other's love language allows you to effectively communicate love in the ways that are most meaningful to your partner. Consciously speaking their love language enhances intimacy.

---

[67] Based on John Bradshaw, "Bradshaw On: the Family", 1988, p39

[68] Gary Chapman, "The Five Love Languages", 1992

Know[3.7-18] Conversation Guide[69,70]

True conversation should be an authentic exchange. It is not a competition to see who can dominate or "win" by making superior points. Good conversation flows spontaneously, guided by the mutual interests and reactions of those participating, instead of relying on pre-planned scripts.

Conversation involves appreciating and respecting what each person has to contribute, with all parties listening, responding appropriately, and working toward mutual understanding. The best conversations unfold naturally, building upon each statement and reaction in the dialogue.

Approach every interaction with an open mind, free from defensiveness, and be willing to be influenced by other views. Finally, strive to convey your meanings clearly and precisely to avoid misunderstandings.

People enjoy discussing: Themselves, families, their hobbies, interests, and material possessions, news and gossip about other people.

Think before you speak: Pause and consider your points before verbalizing them rather than just blurting things out.

Listen more than speak: Make an effort to listen attentively and understand others' perspectives more than pushing your own agenda.

Find the incentive for talking: Before speaking, consider your motivations and whether you are talking to genuinely contribute or just hear yourself.

Never assume: Do not assume you fully understand what someone means or that they comprehended your point as intended.

Take turns: Allow conversations to flow in an orderly way by taking turns speaking and not monopolizing the dialogue.

Focus on the Other Person: Approach each conversation with the desire to learn about and engage with the other individual.

Ask Questions and Listen Attentively: Take a genuine interest in the other person. Ask questions about them and listening carefully to their responses.

Make It a Dialogue: Do not just pause for their answers, ask follow-up questions to continue the conversation.

Focus on "you" rather than "I": Phrase more of your statements as "you" centered rather than "I" centric to keep the focus on them.

Discuss Their Interests: If you know some of their favorite topics, try to steer the dialogue toward those subjects they'll likely enjoy discussing.

Wait to Be Prompted: Only transition to talking about yourself and your own life/experiences after they've prompted you to by asking questions.

Approach It Positively: Adopt an enthusiastic, friendly mindset. If you have fun with it, it's more likely the other person will too.

---

69 Catherine Blyth, "The Art of Conversation", p21

70 Sean McPheat, ,"How to Make Great Conversation and Small Talk", pp9-11

Know[3.7-19] Starting a Conversation[71]

People carry deep desires for personal power, ego gratification, self-respect, recognition, reassurance of worth, excellence, and emotional security. Effective conversation taps into these needs by focusing on them rather than on yourself. The best way to draw someone out is to show genuine interest in them, listen attentively, including to what they do not say, and encourage them to talk about themselves with leading questions. Always speak in terms of their interests, not your own, and make them feel important by sincerely acknowledging their efforts and qualities.

A person's favorite topic is usually themselves, followed by their family, work, hobbies, politics, and religion. To open a conversation, ask questions that get them talking about these areas. Be kind, courteous, friendly, and smile; your attitude sets the tone for their response. With strangers, take the lead by asking about their interests, giving sincere compliments, or showing respect for their knowledge or skills. Remember that praise differs from flattery: praise is specific and genuine, acknowledging what a person does rather than offering vague compliments about who they are. Finally, accept people as they are, focus on their strengths, and criticizing them.

Know[3.7-20] Difficult Conversations

Every difficult conversation is actually three conversations, layered or embedded, one within another:[72]

What Happened: Difficult conversations revolve around disagreements about events or actions: who did what, who is right or wrong, what intentions were, and who holds responsibility.

Feelings: Emotions always play a role. You choose whether to acknowledge your feelings or dismiss them as inappropriate, and you face the other person's feelings too, whether they express anger, hurt, or something else. Even unspoken, their emotions affect you, as your emotions affect them.

Identity: Beneath it all lies the private conversation with yourself about what this means for your identity. Does it show you are competent or incompetent, good or bad, lovable or unlovable? Your conclusions shape whether you remain calm or spiral into anxiety. The other person likely faces similar questions within themselves.

Handling all three layers at once is challenging but yields better outcomes than charging ahead blindly. You cannot remove the inherent difficulties, complex facts, new information, or threats to your self-image, but you can choose your response. Your response dictates the outcome of the situation.

Instead of assuming you know everything, explore their perspective as respectfully as you treat your own. Instead of hiding or exploding with emotion, express your feelings clearly. Accept the situation as it is, rather than an attack on your self-image. Keeping these ideas in mind leads to more grounded, productive conversations.

---

[71] James K. Van Fleet, "Lifetime Conversation Guide", 1984

[72] Douglas Stone, et al, "Difficult Conversations", p41

Know[3.7-21] Toxic Relationships

Sick people can't make healthy relationships.

--Recovery Aphorism

Relationships that cause harm are called "toxic". They occur when one or both people in a relationship prioritize an idealized and often unrealistic conception of "love" over respect, trust, and true affection.[73]

Signs of a toxic relationship are:[74]

Persistent unhappiness and lack of joy in the relationship.
Feeling anxious, angry, or resigned when with your partner.
Negative shifts in your mental health, personality, or self-esteem.
Feeling like you cannot talk openly with your partner.
Your partner is jealous and controlling.
Your partner limits your interactions with others.
Friends and family are concerned about the relationship.

A toxic relationship causes numerous severe issues:[75]

Trust issues and guardedness with others. You become suspicious and closed off, struggling to open up after being hurt.
Persistent negative mindset. The constant negativity in a toxic relationship becomes ingrained, leaving you in a perpetual bad mood.
Loss of optimism and joyful perspective. Your once hopeful outlook is replaced by anxiousness, fear and cynicism.
Emotional exhaustion from catering to toxic needs. Simply being around the toxic person drains you emotionally.
Shattered self-confidence and self-worth. Repeated denial of love and support steadily chips away at your self-esteem.
Stunted sense of identity and personal growth. The controlling behavior convinces you that you need the toxic partner.
Distorted view of what a healthy relationship looks like. You come to believe mistreatment is normal.
Physical health consequences. The chronic stress and anxiety eventually take a severe toll on your overall physical health.

Extricating yourself from a toxic relationship is difficult but necessary; the scars it inflicts are destructive and long-lasting.

Warning Signs to Look for in Conversation[76]

Be cautious of people who lack focus, fidget constantly, dress inappropriately or flamboyantly, show low energy or apathy, or display odd behaviors, speech, posture, or gait. Watch for excessive drama, attention-seeking, impatience, intolerance, emotional coldness, paranoia, poor hygiene, constant interruptions, loudness, tension, nervousness, or inappropriate remarks and personal questions from near strangers.

---

73 https://markmanson.net/toxic-relationship-signs
74 https://www.healthline.com/health/toxic-relationship
75 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE7pLUwdG70&ab_channel=Psych2Go
76 David J. Lieberman, PhD, "Find Out Who's Normal and Who's Not"

Know[3.7-22] The Magical Other[77]

> [Is this normal?] *It's normal for an unhealthy relationship.*
>
> --Don Carter, MSW, LCSW

> *You picked her.*
>
> --John, AA Member

In relationships, the idea of finding happiness through romantic love often falls short. Despite what our culture promises, relying on a partner to solve all your problems leads only to disappointment. No one can meet all your needs. Even though falling in love feels perfect at first, flaws eventually become apparent, causing frustration and resentment when your partner does not live up to your expectations. In my own life, relationships were just another addiction. (See Codependency p. 445)

> *Expectations in relationships are just resentments waiting to happen.*
>
> --Anonymous

The anima and animus are inner archetypes of feminine and masculine qualities.[78] When you project these onto a "magical other," you idealize your partner as a perfect savior to fulfill all your hidden desires. Rather than seeing the other person realistically, you overlay them with these inner images, creating powerful attraction, obsession, or disappointment.

> *I put her in the place... of where my Higher Power should have been.*
>
> --Tim, AA Member

To break free from this cycle, focus on knowing what your needs are, and finding healthy ways to fill them. Get professional help. Stop believing in the fantasy of finding the perfect partner and instead concentrate on your own growth and happiness. Healthy relationships come from mutual respect and support, not dependence. By letting go of the idea of a "Magical Other," you will find true fulfillment and love within yourself.

Know[3.7-23] How to stop thinking of someone:[79]

Sometimes it is hard to stop thinking about someone from a difficult relationship, but constant rumination only brings mental anguish. Consider why you are fixated, whether you are clinging to unrealized hopes, idealizing that person, or casting them as a villain. Practice acceptance by facing reality through meditation or journaling, and use distractions like reading, music, exercise, or focusing on your own goals. Create physical and emotional distance by limiting contact and avoiding their social media. Stay mindful and present; with time, the intensity of your fixation will fade. Forgiving them, even just for your own peace, helps you move on.

---

[77] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JH7GS5gGSx0

[78] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anima_and_animus

[79] https://hackspirit.com/how-to-stop-thinking-about-someone-14-steps-to-move-on-with-your-life/

Codependency

The only thing all my failed relationships had in common was that I was in them.

--Dennis, AA Member

Codependency is an unhealthy reliance on others for your sense of identity and self-worth.[80] It stems from a deep need for external validation and approval. Codependents sacrifice personal needs and boundaries to please others, engage in caretaking behaviors, and are unable to derive self-esteem from within. Codependent traits usually result from trauma in childhood, often where at least one parent is "addicted, mentally ill, abusive, or neglectful".[81] Breaking this cycle requires working on self-validation, autonomy, and balanced relationships.

I wish I didn't have to build my box of okayness by what other people thought of me.

--Tim, AA Member

Know[3.7-24] Traits of Codependence:[82]

Have difficulty identifying their feelings.
Minimize, alter, or deny their feelings.
Perceive themselves as being unselfish and dedicated to others.
Have difficulty making decisions.
Judge their thought, words and actions as never good enough.
Are embarrassed to receive recognition, praise or gifts.
Are unable to ask others to meet their needs or wants.
Value other people's approval of themselves over their own.
Compromise their values and integrity to avoid rejection and anger.
Are very sensitive to others' feelings and assume the same feelings.
Are extremely loyal and remain in harmful situations too long.
Are afraid to express differing viewpoints or feelings.
Put aside personal interests to do what others want.
Accept sex as a substitute for love.
Believe most others are incapable of caring for themselves.
Attempt to convince others what they should think or feel.
Become resentful when others refuse their offers of help.
Freely offer advice and guidance without being asked.
Lavish gifts and favors on those they care about.
Use sex to gain approval and acceptance.

As I personally learned, codependence can be thought of as a kind of addiction, where the drug of choice is validation and approval from other people. For a codependent person, lack of external validation and approval can cause anxiety, anger, and depression. Depending on severity, people may go to great lengths to fill those perceived needs.

---

80 Margaret Paul, "Inner Bonding", p30
81 https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/conquering-codependency/202010/how-conquer-codependency
82 Codependents Anonymous, "What is Codependence?", Pamphlet

Like other addictions, codependence can be treated through 12 Step programs (Codependents Anonymous, or CoDA) and therapy. Professional help and 12 Step support groups are best. But you can also work on codependence yourself.[83] (See The 12 Steps of Codependents Anonymous p. 28)

Know[3.7-25] How to Work on Codependence

Understand Your Codependency: Acknowledge how deeply you depend on others for self-worth and identity. These behaviors often start in childhood, familial neglect or enmeshment teach us to prioritize others' needs at the expense of our own and struggle with maintaining healthy boundaries.

Take Steps to Recover: Journal about your true needs and emotions, tracking where your behavior becomes harmful or codependent. Journaling and mindful practices help surface recurring themes and validate your inner experience. Treat yourself with compassion while confronting distorted beliefs about worth and dependency.

Boost Your Self-Esteem: Intentionally build genuine self-esteem by practicing daily affirmations, gratitude, and celebrating small achievements. According to recovery models, this builds internal validation rather than reliance on others. Embrace imperfection as part of being human.[84]

Set Healthy Boundaries: Examine your motives and begin asserting your values and limits. Codependency often involves saying "yes" automatically, you can undo that by communicating assertively, learning to say "no," and protecting your emotional and physical space.

Release Your Need for Control: Acknowledge that you cannot fix or control others, only yourself. Focus on self-love and self-acceptance while using boundaries to express needs clearly and respectfully. This shift liberates you from exhausting caretaker roles.

Process Emotions Directly: Identify avoidance strategies like isolation, overwork, or substance use. Allow yourself to feel difficult emotions rather than suppressing them. Seek support through therapy or peer groups when necessary, and practice honest communication about how you feel.[85]

Reclaim Your Authentic Self: Through these ongoing practices, you gradually forge healthier relationships and a stronger sense of self. Emotional well-being improves as you reconnect with your values and reclaim autonomy. Celebrate small breakthroughs and be patient; look for a gradual journey, not a sudden transformation.

---

[83] https://www.simplypsychology.org/how-to-heal-from-codependency-2.html

[84] https://codependencyrecovery.org/2024/05/05/how-to-increase-self-worth-in-codependency-recovery

[85] https://insightrecoverytc.com/codependency-recovery-steps

Know[3.7-26] **RaDaR in Relationships**

RaDaR (Reflect, Describe, Respond) is a powerful tool you can use to bring greater clarity and integrity to your relationships. RaDaR is also discussed in Step 10 and Knowledge. (See pages 116, 218, 260, 306, 384, 447, 788)

It begins with Reflect, taking a step back from reactive emotion to ask, "What am I feeling right now? What story am I telling myself about this person or situation?" This step interrupts automatic patterns by creating a moment of mindful awareness before speaking or acting. For example, after a tense conversation, you might reflect, "I am feeling angry and dismissed. I notice I am telling myself they do not care about me."

The second step is Describe. Here, you translate your reflections into clear language. You might internally note, "I am hurt because I expected support, but instead, I feel dismissed," or you may describe aloud to your partner, "When you interrupted me just now, I felt like my thoughts did not matter." This is not blaming but simply naming your inner reality with honest, nonjudgmental words. It allows both you and the other person to see what is actually happening beneath defensive surface reactions. For instance, instead of saying, "You never listen to me," you might say, "I felt shut down when I was interrupted, because I really wanted to share something important."

Finally, Respond involves choosing a thoughtful action based on your reflections and descriptions. Instead of withdrawing, lashing out, or clinging, you respond with purpose. You might set a boundary by saying, "Can we pause and let me finish my thought before you respond?" or you might ask for clarification, "Was there something you disagreed with?" You might offer empathy, "I sense you were stressed and did not mean to dismiss me," or decide to let go of the expectation altogether if it no longer serves. This response strengthens your self-respect and the integrity of the relationship.

Using RaDaR in relationships shifts interactions from automatic reaction to conscious choice. It reduces blame and projection by owning your feelings and needs before communicating them. It also creates space for the other person's experience, promoting dialogue rather than conflict escalation.

Over time, practicing RaDaR deepens mutual understanding and trust because each person feels heard and respected. Instead of spiraling in old patterns of defensiveness or silence, RaDaR keeps your relationship grounded in honest awareness, clear expression, and intentional action. It becomes a path to emotional maturity and authenticity, allowing love and connection to grow in an atmosphere of truth and safety.

Know[3.7-27] **Ethics**

While morals generally refer to your personal ideas of right and wrong, ethics are more like codified rules. They govern your relationships and interactions with other individuals, groups, and society. Philosophers, spiritual leaders, and thinkers have proposed various frameworks to help you understand ethical problems and make the right decisions. Three prominent approaches are Natural Ethics, The Golden Rule, and The Categorical Imperative, each offering a unique take on how to determine ethical behavior.

Natural Ethics (Natural Law) is, in simple terms, that you do good by helping others.[86] Filling needs is good for all living things. Withholding that which fills needs is harmful. This becomes a simple criterion for knowing right from wrong. Use this rule, with common sense, to make practical decisions.

The Golden Rule, often expressed as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is a fundamental ethical principle found in various cultures and religious traditions around the world.[87] It encourages you to act toward others in the same way you want to be treated.

The Categorical Imperative, proposed by Immanuel Kant, emphasizes acting according to moral principles that could be universally accepted by all rational beings.[88] Similar to the Golden Rule, it states that you should only act by rules that you would want everyone else to follow, too.

Know[3.7-28] Simple Ethics

Over time, I put together a list of questions that help me decide the right course of action when things get confusing:

Am I trying to satisfy my needs: Physical, Safety, Belonging and Love, Esteem, Self-Fulfillment?
Am I motivated by ego: Self-esteem, pride, ambition, security, personal relations, control, finances?
Does it break any laws or rules?
Would there be any negative consequences if I were caught or discovered?
Would anyone find it unfair, hurtful, embarrassing, or unpleasant?
Would I keep it secret from my partner, family, or friends (other than normal matters of privacy)?
Is it something I would not want someone to do to me?
Would I feel guilty or bad about myself afterward?
Does it do the greatest good for everyone concerned?
Am I obligated to do or not do some specific action?
Would a virtuous ("good") person do it?
Does it make the world better?
What is my payoff?
What is the next right thing?

---

[86] https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/natural-law.asp#:~:text=Natural%20law%20is%20an%20ethical,and%20the%20right%20to%20happiness.
[87] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule
[88] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categorical_imperative

3.8 Finances

A man said, "I am a poor man and have nothing." The Teacher said, "You have Awareness and Consciousness, you have sensations and the breath in your body, you can see the sunlight in the day and the stars at night, you hear birds singing and wind blowing and music and speech, and yet you say you have nothing. You are indeed a very poor man."

--Zen Saying

I don't think I'll ever live in a house with crystal chandeliers but I'm doing pretty good... God always gives me what I need when I need it.

--Ricky, AA Member

Money itself won't bring happiness, but it sure makes paying the bills easier.

--Thomas J. Vilord

Finances Content

1. About Finances	449
2. Truths About Finances	450
3. Dollars and Sense	451
4. Money = Relationship	451
5. Creating a Budget	452
6. Other Considerations	453
7. Wealth: Theresa's Story	454

Know[3.8-01] **About Finances**

Financial health is more than numbers in a bank account. How you handle money reflects your emotional well-being and your ability to apply practical wisdom in your decisions. Money touches almost every aspect of your life, from your living conditions to what you eat. The way you earn, spend, save and share money reveals your core values, priorities and self-discipline.

Being good with money requires that you know the difference between needs, wants, and keeping up appearances. It demands you make trade-offs and delay gratification. Overspending often stems from trying to fill inner voids through impulse buying and trivial material belongings.[1] Financial health grows from emotional well-being and maturity.

Money is a primary means of engaging with society. How you apply or waste your financial resources is a powerful expression of your principles. Your relationship with money reflects your relationship with yourself and the world around you. Working on healthy finances is another step on your journey to living a good life.

---

[1] https://visionmountain.com/abundance-busting-the-myth/

Know[3.8-02] **Truths About Finances**

1. Society presents you with mixed messages concerning wealth. Accumulating riches is often portrayed as the ultimate sign of success. Wealth is equated with power, influence, luxury, and security. And while society celebrates material wealth, religion and philosophy teach detachment from it. These conflicting attitudes create confusion in your value system.[2]

2. Comparing your wealth to others makes you feel dissatisfied, envious, and gives you a skewed view of success. Instead of finding fulfillment in your achievements and relationships, you reduce your worth to material possessions.[3] This leads to unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

3. Money, itself, is a brutal reality measured in cold numbers. You either have enough, or you do not. You have a car, or you walk. You pay for housing, or you are homeless. You support yourself, or you are dependent on others. The sooner you accept this stark financial reality, the better off you will be.

4. Having enough money provides well-being, to a point. Financial resources blunt the impact of personal setbacks. In other words, you need enough money avoid misery. Beyond that, money does not make you happier.[4]

5. Separating needs from wants, and being disciplined about how you spend your money, is necessary for building wealth.[5]

6. Pleasure, pride, and a sense of entitlement leads to poor financial decisions and debt. Align your financial habits with common sense principles.[6]

7. The best tool for financial health is a detailed budget.[7] Creating and keeping a budget is the means of constantly monitoring how much money you make, how much you save and invest, and how much you spend.

8. Mindless impulse spending on small items adds up significantly over time. Those tiny luxuries that do not seem expensive cost more than you think. Try to delay gratification. Align your spending with your values and goals.[8]

9. Finances can be complex. Get expert help if you need it.

10. Money is one of the most influential symbolic concepts in all of human history. And yet, people rarely learn practical financial skills.[9] Make financial literacy part of your goal to living a good life.

---

[2] https://www.thenordicpsychiatrist.com/post/a-reflection-on-money-happiness-and-mental-health

[3] https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun04/discontents

[4] https://www.fox9.com/news/heres-how-much-money-you-need-to-make-to-be-happy-living-in-the-us-according-to-study

[5] https://money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/slideshows/dear-younger-me-12-financial-truths-we-wish-we-knew-earlier

[6] https://www.lcbcchurch.com/articles/3-lies-we-believe-about-money-the-truths-to-master-them

[7] Aaron Clarey, "Bachelor Pad Economics", p46

[8] https://www.cnbc.com/2017/01/23/7-hard-truths-about-money-that-everyone-should-learn-in-their-20s.html

[9] Eric Tyson, MBA, "Personal Finance for Dummies 5th Ed.", p13-14

Dollars and Sense

I was born poor. I remember when I was little, having an outhouse instead of an indoor toilet. Neither of my parents went beyond the eighth grade. My dad drove a dump truck and my mom cleaned houses. I did not go to a dentist or have a routine medical exam until it was required by the school system when I was 14.

When my dad's heart condition forced him to quit working, my mom's factory job became the family's sole income. I was 16 when my dad died. My mom had three kids still at home, a mountain of debt, and $2.53 in cash.

I say this to give you some understanding of my background. While we were low income, I did not know that. There were many families worse off than we were. I had no idea of the struggles my parents went through. But we had a house, clothes, and food. Our belongings were not expensive, but we did not do without. My parents worked hard, and I am proud of them both.

By the time my mom passed, her house was paid off, and she had enough money put away to leave each of her four children a quite respectable nest egg. The fact that she did this on a factory worker's pay, a small retirement stipend, and Social Security gave me food for thought.

I habitually carried a large credit card debt. Now, I took another look at my financial habits because I did not want to waste, or disrespect, all the sacrifices my mom had made for her children.

In the winter of my life, I do not have a lot of money, but I like to say, "I am not rich, but I am not poor either." I have enough to live comfortably, and I have learned the difference between money and wealth. While there is definitely an overlap, they are not the same thing.

Know[3.8-03] **Money = Relationship**

People are not fully rational, and they make many choices that, if reflected upon, they would do differently. --Daniel Kahneman[10]

You may know someone who works hard but never seems to get ahead, while others launch billion-dollar startups from a garage, win the lottery, or gain fame, only to lose it all. These stories stir emotions because they reveal life's unpredictability and the mix of perseverance, luck, and circumstance behind success or failure. They remind you that money is never just about a bunch of numbers; it is tied to hope, fear, pride, and meaning.

Money is more than a medium of exchange; it is a relationship that mirrors your inner world and values. Your attitude toward money shapes your choices, behaviors, and interactions with others. Developing a healthy relationship with money is much more important than trying to get rich.

Your budget reflects, or summarizes, your relationship with money. It helps you steward your money with clarity and intention. It aligns what you spend your money on, with what is valuable in your life.

---

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uYnj1i1EQw

Know[3.8-04] **Creating a Budget**

The necessary lesson before beginning your budget is this:[11]

All financial problems come from spending more than you make.

Your budget is the tool by which you determine if you are living within your means. And while some budgets may be complex, the idea is as simple as basic addition and subtraction. The hard part of budgeting is creating it, and then sticking to it.

Your level of success in budgeting is strongly correlated with other personality traits.[12] So, working on general self-development can help you create a more mature view of your finances. And, putting time and effort into your budget helps you develop other positive attributes.

Budgeting is the primary tool of healthy personal finance.[13] A budget tracks your income and expenses so you can better understand your cash flow. Done right, a budget empowers you. You can allocate more toward what matters and less toward what is not. It provides flexibility to adjust for life's surprises, allowing you to prioritize as needed.

There are countless ways to budget, but the tool matters less than your willingness to use it. Whether you prefer a spreadsheet, an app, or pencil and paper, the hardest part of budgeting is facing the anxiety, boredom, or avoidance that keeps you from managing your money well.

Through your budget you have an accurate sense of your values, whether you admit them or not. You may tell yourself you think something is important, but when you see what you spend your money on, you will know.

A good starting point is the 50/30/20 rule:[14] allocate 50% of after-tax income to needs, 30% to wants, and 20% to savings or debt repayment. Adjust the ratios to fit your situation. Your needs may demand more than 50%, or paying down debt might take priority over discretionary spending. Stay aware of the three categories: needs, wants, and savings. Use them to make good choices.

If traditional budgets feel overwhelming, try this unique approach for 30 days, a week, or even just one day: commit to spending as little money as possible. Say "no" to all the nonessential crap you usually buy for that period of time, and you might be surprised how much money you save.

Money can't buy happiness, but spending relates to happiness in complicated ways. People spend most on stuff for themselves, uncorrelated with life satisfaction. Giving to others or spending on experiences with others tends to increase happiness more than stuff.

--Michael Norton[15]

---

[11] Aaron Clarey, "Bachelor Pad Economics", p46

[12] https://www.financialplanningassociation.org/article/journal/OCT21-ocean-how-does-personality-predict-financial-success

[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcAY6qRHlw0

[14] https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/022916/what-502030-budget-rule.asp

[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uYnj1i1EQw

Know[3.8-05] **Other Considerations**

Your financial life should reflect your true values, not cultural illusions. Set goals that align with who you are and what matters to you. Free yourself from the need to impress others or chase hollow measures of success. Remember, one of the smartest ways to get ahead is simply to avoid dumb mistakes. Children, marriage, divorce, and occupational choices all carry deep financial implications. Choose relationships and paths that align with your long-term well-being rather than impulse or expectation.

Money is only part of your life. Occasionally calculate your net worth to get a snapshot of your financial reality (subtract what you owe from what you have) but do not let this define your life. Instead, focus on meaningful ways to earn, whether through traditional work, side projects, or creative pursuits. Know that your work's meaning is what you bring to it. Even routine jobs give dignity when done with care and self-respect.

Spending wisely requires honesty. Pause before buying; ask if it is a need or a want, and how many hours of your life it costs. Save first, then spend what remains, not the reverse. This mindset builds true financial resilience. Create the habit of saving by automating small amounts and prioritizing an emergency fund to cover unexpected shocks. Financial independence grows through small, consistent steps taken over years, not dramatic windfalls.

Prepare for unexpected events. Keep extra food, water, and basic supplies as a practical safety net, not from fear but from caution. Think long-term with your investments, diversify to reduce risk, and avoid chasing quick profits. When borrowing, use credit with care; its true value lies in responsibility, not in purchasing power. Insurance remains an important safeguard; do not ignore it in hopes that you will never need it.

Above all, remember your deepest priorities: health, family, friendships, meaningful work, personal growth, and community. Money is only a tool. Use it well, but never confuse it with life itself. Take responsibility for your financial wellbeing, rely on yourself, and make your choices with courage and integrity. That is the financial part of living a good life.

The old roadmap was growth is good, more is better. The new one realizes there is an "enough" point -- having what you need for the life you love, with nothing in excess.

--Vicki Robin[16]

Satisfaction and contentment come from appreciating what you have. There are two ways to be rich: one is to have a lot of money, the other is to have fewer desires.[17] Make the most of your money, but do not forget that many things are more important than money.

The story that follows is about what has real value and meaning in this life. Figure that out, and you will always have enough.

Those who know they have enough are truly wealthy. --Lao Tzu

---

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uYnj1i1EQw

[17] Eric Tyson, MBA, "Personal Finance for Dummies 5th Ed", p59

Wealth: Theresa's Story

My name is Theresa, and I grew up in Chicago, Illinois. As a kid, I was gifted in some ways, but there was plenty I lacked. My family mostly walked the other side of the street, hustlers, players, pimps, and prostitutes. But my mom was different, straight and narrow, trying to hold us together despite everything. She taught me how to take care of a family, but never taught me about the streets. That's where I learned my hardest lessons.

By my teenage years, I blamed myself for everything. Back then, it wasn't okay to be gay. That shame wrapped around me like a noose. I didn't feel safe being myself, not at home, not anywhere. I started sneaking drinks just to quiet the war in my head. Being gay didn't ruin my life, but hiding it, hating it, and trying to drown it sure came close. By seventeen, I was full throttle. If I was gonna be a fool, I was gonna be a damn fool all the way.

Eventually, I had a daughter. She was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen, my light in the middle of all that darkness. But I was still deep in my addiction, and the drugs and alcohol slowly pulled me away from her. I didn't know how to be a mother while I was still trying to survive myself. I loved her more than anything, but love isn't always enough when you're sick and lost. I carry that pain with me every day. Losing that connection broke something in me, but it also planted a seed. She's one of the reasons I fought to get clean. I hope one day she'll know how much I've always loved her, even when I didn't know how to show it.

I caught my case when I was drunk, and a man tried to solicit me. I told him no, but when he came at me again later in a dark alley, I defended myself with a knife. The courts didn't care about what he tried to do to me. They saw a poor Black girl and charged me with attempted murder with a weapon. I got fifteen years. Prison was hell, but it saved my life. It took me off the streets, away from gangs and dope, and that's where I met God. I learned to take accountability for what I did, even when the system didn't care about my side of the story. That's just how life is sometimes.

I came out older and wiser, but addiction kept pulling me back. I traded alcohol for heroin when I hit St. Louis, and ended up homeless, living under a bridge on Christmas Day. I overdosed that week. When I woke up in the hospital, I knew I was done. I got on my knees outside and begged God to take it from me because I knew I was going to die. That was my surrender. I went into treatment and got stable on my meds for bipolar and schizoaffective disorder, diagnoses I never wanted to accept, but had to.

Now, three years later, I go to meetings. I have a home that is quiet and mine. I pay my bills, and I dream of becoming a truck driver so I can see the world beyond its dark corners. If I could tell my younger self anything, I would say: "God has a plan. Trust Him. It is not all in vain." Everything I went through made me who I am today, and I like this person. The most important thing in life is your relationship with God. Without being spiritually fit, none of this means anything. Life taught me: your story is not over until you are dead. You can change it anytime, right in the middle. And mine is just beginning.

3.9 Practice and Projects

Self-development is a noble pursuit, one that can lead you toward greater self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and positive growth. But be careful not to become so focused on self-development that you neglect engaging with the world around you. You are a multifaceted being, requiring many different kinds of activities and practices. Before you "become" anything else, be sure to "be you" first.

If you get overly consumed by your endeavors in self-development, you run the risk of becoming disconnected from the richness of real-life experience. Becoming a better person is important, of course, but it is not the entire journey. You must make space for other interests that ignite your passions, challenge your skills, and connect you with beauty, community, and the present moment.

Only you can decide what these practices and projects might be. The possibilities are literally endless. Perhaps you have a creative itch for painting, writing poetry, or learning a musical instrument. Maybe you feel most alive when moving your body through dance, exercise, or team sports. Or perhaps your greatest joys come from intellectual engagement like reading literature (or comic books), playing strategy games, collecting baseball cards, or having deep conversations with others.

The key is to find modes of being and doing that enhance your self-improvement mindset, and guide you into different areas that engage your senses, emotions, physical aliveness, and social connections. When you commit yourself to outside practice and projects, you find strengths and talents that personal growth work alone cannot train or improve.

For instance, learning to play a new musical instrument requires patience, playfulness, and being okay with "not knowing" in a tangible way. It builds concentration while loosening your grip on self-consciousness. Painting or writing fiction demands you create from within, accessing an innovative flow state. Dancing, taking classes, and team sports reinforce qualities such as listening, partnership, and being part of a larger whole.

Growth comes not just from turning inward, or trying to be better, but from wholehearted living and relating to the world in all its raw uncertainty. Always continue your path of personal development, but be sure you bring your whole self along the way. And while this entire section is only one page, give it equal weight to the eight other sections in Knowledge. Balance is key to living a good life.

3.9 Practice and Projects

Know[3.9-01] Creating Your Practice & Projects

Reflect

Even if you believe you have no real interests, you are human, and you have a spirit and a brain. Humans are naturally curious. People often abandon their own interests for many reasons, but they are still there, below the surface. Ask yourself these questions:

What activities have ever made me feel alive, engaged, or at peace?
What interests or hobbies have I always wanted to try but never did?
Have I ever said to myself, "I always wanted to try that, but…"

Brainstorm & List

Write down 10 practices or projects that interest you. Do not judge these, thinking they are too expensive or beyond your current physical skills. Even those things that seem out of reach now may have a variation that is available to you. Examples are getting a degree or certificate, learning a skill, playing a musical instrument, writing, drawing or painting, hiking and exploring, volunteering, martial arts, learning a language, traveling, meeting new people.

Prioritize

Circle two or three that feel energizing and realistic for your current situation. This is where you consider your budget, time available, physical mobility, age, and so on. Filter the list by your capabilities, rather than by your limits.

Set Intention & Schedule

This is the exciting part, where it gets real. For each of your chosen practices or projects, set your intention and create a working plan. Ask yourself why you want to do this and what meaning or benefit it holds for you. Decide when you will start, and how often you will engage in it. Setting a clear intention and practical schedule turns vague goals into actions and increases your commitment.

Start Small

Commit to a limited trial for a project or practicing a new skill. Keep it low pressure and exploratory. Do it for enjoyment, not out of obligation.

Review and Adjust

At the end of your designated time, ask yourself:
How did this make me feel?
What did I learn about myself?
Do I want to continue, adjust, or try something new next time?

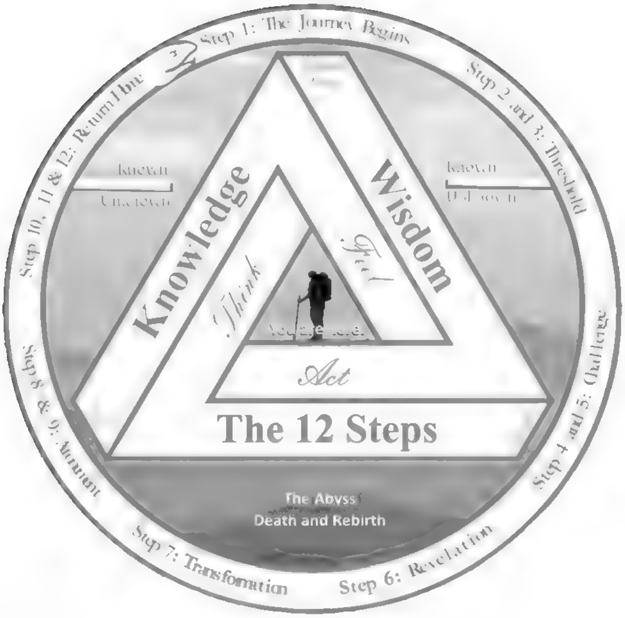
Integrate

Bring a variety of new projects, practices, and skills into your life on a regular basis. Intentionally seeking out and incorporating these experiences keeps you flexible and resilient in living well.

12 Steps to a Good Life

The Hero's Journey Through Knowledge & Wisdom

Part 2


Step 1: The Journey Begins
Step 2 and 3: Threshold
Step 4 and 5: Challenge
Step 6: Revelation
Step 7: Transformation
Step 8 & 9: Atonement
Step 10, 11 & 12: Return Home
Known
Unknown
Known
Unknown
Knowledge
Wisdom
Think
Feel
You are here
Act
The 12 Steps
The Abyss
Death and Rebirth

Thomas Aletheia

This page intentionally left blank.

Part 4: Wisdom

Introduction to the Texts

This section contains works of wisdom. To read them is to be transformed. They bring comfort to uncertainty. They guide, inform, and illuminate. Divine inspiration or earthly wisdom, they are the finest thoughts of brilliant minds. You may not read these every day, but every day that you do read them, you will be better for it. You will be calmer, more grounded, and find peace with yourself.

Leaves of Life (for Daily Inspiration) (1914)
A beautiful work by Margaret Bird Steinmetz. It consists of poetry, quotes, and prayers for each day. Public domain is from Gutenberg.org.[1] I have taken significant liberties with the contents. Entries were added, deleted, and modified for presentation and readability.

Zen Thoughts: (c. 1200 CE)
Many of these are from "The Collection of Stone and Sand", also know as "Sand and Pebbles" (Shasekishū).[2] It is a collection of Buddhist koans and fables compiled in 1283 by the Japanese Zen priest Mujū Ichien during the Kamakura era. It offers enlightening and often humorous tales that reflect the customs and daily lives of ordinary people in medieval Japan. Others were inspired by various stories in the public domain. I have edited these stories, trading generic nouns like "teacher" for proper nouns. They have been changed for readability and simplicity, and are in no particular order.

The Enchiridion (en-ki-RID-ee-uhn)[3] (125 CE) or "Handbook"[4]
The Enchiridion is a compilation of ethical advice from the Greek Stoic Epictetus (EP-ik-TEE-tus).[5] Compiled by Arrian, a 2nd-century disciple of Epictetus, it focuses on applying Stoic principles to daily life. It offers practical suggestions on how to live a contented life with a realistic perspective. Paragraph introductions are mine and not part of the original translation. Public domain, Internet Archive, translated by George Long, 1890.

The Gospel of Matthew (80 CE)
The first book of the Christian New Testament. It narrates the life of Jesus from birth to the crucifixion and resurrection. It is the book of the New Testament I turned to when I wanted to "read it for myself". It also perfectly illustrates personal and spiritual duality of the Hero's Journey. Chapter headings[6] and five discourses added.[7] Public domain, World English Bible.[8]

---

1 https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14849/14849-h/14849-h.htm
2 https://beingzen.com/zen-koans/shasekishu-sand-and-pebbles/
3 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enchiridion
4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enchiridion_of_Epictetus
5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S424bXI-rOI
6 https://versenotes.org/chapter-by-chapter/matthew/#chapter-1
7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Discourses_of_Matthew
8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_English_Bible

The Dhammapada[9] (daa-muh-PAA-duh)[10] (300 BCE)
A book of sayings by the Buddha. It is one of the most widely known Buddhist texts, with numerous translations. According to tradition, the verses of the Dhammapada were spoken by the Buddha on different occasions throughout his life. By distilling the Buddha's complex teachings into clear, accessible language, the Dhammapada makes the Buddhist path accessible to everyone. Public domain, WikiSource, translated by F. Max Muller, 1881.

The Tao Te Ching[11] (DOW-day-JING[12] or TOW-tay-CHING[13]) (400 BCE)
A classic Chinese text attributed to Lao Tzu (lou as in 'loud' - dsoo).[14] It concerns following the Tao ("the Way") through virtue. It describes the Tao as the unseen yet immanent source and ideal of all existence: immensely powerful, supremely humble, and the root of all things. People, with their desires and free will, often act unnaturally, disrupting the Tao's balance. This text guides students back to their natural state in harmony with the Tao, often using paradox to illustrate its teachings. Paragraph introductions are mine and not part of the original translation. Public domain translation by J.H. McDonald, 1996.

The Book of Proverbs (700 BCE)
Found in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament. It discusses values, morals, conduct, and meaning. Its concise sayings offer practical guidance for daily life. Proverbs emphasizes wisdom as the foundation for a meaningful existence. Titles added.[15,16] Public domain from the World English Bible.

The Gospel of Thomas (c. 60 - 250 CE)
A collection of sayings attributed to Jesus, discovered in Egypt in 1945 as part of the Nag Hammadi library. It contains 114 sayings, some resembling the canonical gospels. Scholars speculate that it was buried in response the establishment of a strict canon of Christian scripture.[17] Public domain from gospels.net.

The Gospel of Mary (c. 200 CE)
Discovered in the late 19th century in Egypt, it is a Gnostic text believed to have been written in the 2nd century. It presents a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, focusing prominently on Mary, believed to be Mary Magdalene.[18] The Gospel of Mary provides valuable insights into the diverse beliefs of early Christianity. Public domain from gospels.net.

Note: I admire both Thomas the Apostle (See About the Author p. 785) and Mary Magdalene, who was obviously important to Jesus, but whose reputation was smeared for centuries.[19] For various reasons, these writings were not included in the canonical Bible. The final verse from Thomas is a defense of Mary as equal to the other disciples. It is the perfect segway between the two texts.

---

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhammapada
[10] https://www.google.com/search?q=pronounce%20dhammapada
[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tao_Te_Ching
[12] https://tao-in-you.com/how-to-pronounce-tao-te-ching/
[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjB4qBV4bzE
[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymqi1A4Pem8
[15] OpenAI, 30 Nov. 2023, https://www.openai.com.
[16] https://theopolisinstitute.com/the-dramatic-structure-of-proverbs/
[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Thomas
[18] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mary#The_identity_of_%22Mary%22
[19] https://uscatholic.org/articles/201603/who-framed-mary-magdalene/

Part 4: Wisdom

Wisd[4.1-01] About the Books of Wisdom

While some may find it controversial that half of this volume is from the public domain, I present these texts without apology. They are examples of the world's greatest philosophical and spiritual teachings, chosen for their resonance with truth and reflection of 12 Step principles. They are now in your hand, anytime, always. I love these books; the more I read them, the more I love them. Here are some additional notes concerning the texts of Wisdom:

Similarities of Texts: You will find many similarities in Wisdom. Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, tells us when we are struck on the right cheek, "turn… the other also" (Matt[016] 5:39). Buddha, in the Dhammapada, says "woe to him who flies at his aggressor" (Dham[55] 389). You will also find passages in Wisdom that directly support or mirror what you find in the 12 Steps and the Hero's Journey.

Contradictions of Texts: Some of the passages in Wisdom appear contradictory. Lao Tzu says in the Tao Te Ching, "… trust is the beginning of chaos." (TaoT[038] 38). Yet Jesus tells us that with faith we can move mountains (Matt[065] 17:20).

To reconcile these apparent contradictions, consider the following aphorisms: "Look before you leap," and "He who hesitates is lost."[20] Despite a seeming contradiction, they both contain a kernel of truth: consider decisions carefully, and then act without hesitation. Yet they have different implied audiences: the first to those who act impulsively, the latter to individuals frozen by indecision. Both phrases are true in the correct context.

Translation Errors: In Wisdom, the oldest passages are over 2,700 years old (parts of The Book of Proverbs). Six of the books were written after, sometimes hundreds of years after, the events they describe. They were preserved for generations by oral traditions before they were written down. The written texts were then manually copied many times by hand. In the modern era, they were translated to English from the original languages, and no two languages can be directly mapped, syntactically or word-by-word, from one to another.[21] Because of the way these texts were handed down to us,[22] literal interpretations are difficult. I will give you a couple of examples:

1. Many preachers make note of the passage where Jesus said, "…this generation shall not pass away, until all these things are accomplished." Their purpose is to pin down the "end of days." The problem is that the word translated to "generation" can also mean "race."[23] So, you are either talking about a span of 30 or 40 years, or all human history. Be careful when assigning specific, literal meaning to an English word or phrase in these texts.

---

[20] The apparent contradiction of many truisms, and specifically these two, provided motivation for me to investigate what "truth" is, and how it is transmitted and assimilated through language.

[21] Dr. Daniel Wallace, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZ5cgQUJnrI&list=WL&index=1

[22] Details of this process for the Bible are described in "Misquoting Jesus, Who Changed the Bible and Why", Bart D. Ehrman, 2005

[23] World English Bible, Matthew 24:34

2. Sin: When I was 9 years old, due to the teachings of my church, I believed I was going to burn in hell with no chance of reprieve. So, how the word "sin" is used has great importance to me. Decades later, I began to understand that the meanings of sacred texts may differ through their translation and interpretation.

Here are multiple examples: In the Bible, the words translated to "sin" originally meant: "missing the mark," or "to slip, to fall, or to wander from the path."[24] In the Dhammapada, the word "sin" is used to describe an "unskilled or unwholesome" action.[25] In the Tao Te Ching, Verse 46, one translation says that "There is no sin greater than desire," and that "…to be satisfied is an everlasting sufficiency."[26] The translation you have (TaoT[046]) uses the word "transgression", and states that "Whoever knows contentment will be at peace forever." The Enchiridion Ench[027] says, "As a mark is not set up for the purpose of missing the aim, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world."

3. The phrase "fear of Yahweh" is used 13 times in Proverbs. Proverbs 9:10 (Prov[030]) says, "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom." If, like me, you were taught to fear a wrathful God, this kind of wisdom has little appeal. However, a more direct translation from the original Hebrew says this:[27]

The flowings (Yirah - the teachings (torah) and character (ru'ahh).) of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Hhakhmah - the ability to distinguish between good and bad.): and an intimate relationship with the special one is understanding.

We are not supposed to be afraid of God. When I read sacred texts that speak of "fear" in relation to a Creator, I mentally translate that to "awe and reverence".[28] Fear of a vengeful God is not part of my spiritual life.

4. The word "repent," as used in Matthew, is translated from the Greek word "metanoia."[29] Whereas the former term carries a connotation of hellfire and brimstone, the latter simply means, "change your thoughts" or, "a change of heart". This certainly puts God in a kinder, more loving light.

Limits of Language: There are simply some things that cannot be adequately expressed in words. In my reading, I came across the word, "ineffable", it means "incapable of being expressed in words."[30] Since the texts of Wisdom are specifically about spiritual and philosophical topics, they can sometimes only make references to what may be ineffable knowledge or experiences. Remember this Zen proverb: "The finger that points at the moon is not the moon."

I leave to you the interpretation of these beautiful texts, and how they will affect your life. Since they make up nearly half of this volume, I obviously believe they are to be treasured. These texts, over time, have added great value to my life. I hope you agree and find the same to be true for you.

---

[24] https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/6773/Sin-as-Missing-Mark.htm
[25] https://www.budsas.org/ebud/whatbudbeliev/182.htm
[26] https://www.buzzsprout.com/732839/4808120
[27] https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/living-words/the-living-words-fear.htm
[28] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear_of_God
[29] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanoia_(theology)#Christianity
[30] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ineffable

4.1 Leaves of Life

Wisd[4.1-02] Day of Mindfulness

Purpose: Taking time for mindfulness, whether it's on a specific day or over several days, is a great chance to reflect on the past month and plan for the next. Reflecting on the past month involves looking at your decisions, behavior, experiences, achievements, and challenges. For the upcoming month, you can set goals, make reminders, and plan ahead.

Leaves of Life is a year of daily readings that links to the 12 Steps, Knowledge, and Wisdom. Since there are 12 Steps and 12 months, that is a straightforward connection. While you can address the 12 Steps at any time, focusing on one Step each month over a year offers a convenient way to regularly review and work through them. After initially addressing your primary issues, try this annual review method to keep the Steps active in your life for ongoing self-development.

The Knowledge and Wisdom sections contain practical and realistic guidance on a great variety of subjects and issues. After each entry in Leaves of Life, you are referred to further reading in both sections. These are not related to the daily reading, but are simply reminders that there is more material that may be useful to you in your journey. They are suggestions, not obligations.

Try not to be too rigid in your Hero's Journey. The goal is to consistently review different aspects of your personal life throughout the year. You do not "have to" read any or all of the readings each day. They are placed there to give you additional structure as you need it and find it useful. Over time, your reading practice will come and go, but overall, try to be regular and consistent.

Choosing your day(s): When choosing your day of mindfulness, explore different options. It can be a single day, consecutive days, or spread throughout the month. Pick a specific date, like the first, fifteenth, or last day, for consistency. I prefer the tenth, seventeenth, and twenty-fourth. You could combine the last week of the old month and the first week of the new month for a continuous block. Or, use a theme, such as a full moon for introspection, a waning moon for review, and a waxing moon for planning. Trust your intuition and select a day based on your personal cycles and energy levels for a more meaningful experience.

Build in major reviews, as well. Late December or early January is an excellent time to review the past year. Your birthday month is a wonderful opportunity to take a big-picture look at your life and your current situation. Consider these points:

December-January Year-End Reflection:
Review the year, noting achievements, challenges, and personal growth
Evaluate progress toward long-term goals and living your values
Reflect on lessons learned, relationships, and spiritual progress
Establish goals and intentions for the coming year

4.1 Leaves of Life

Birth Month Life Review:
Take a comprehensive look at your life, from childhood to the present
Reflect on significant milestones, experiences, and lessons learned
Compare your values and principles to your goals and aspirations
Set intentions and goals for the coming year in line with your values

Anniversary Month Relationships Review:
Think about your current relationship
What can you do better?
Are you spending time and effort to maintain the relationship?
List 3 things you are grateful for in your partner

Wisd[4.1-03] Review the Previous Month

Review Last Month's Goals: Begin by reviewing last month's goals. Did you achieve them all? Note what contributed to your success. Were your goals clear and measurable? Did you establish new habits to support them? Document the steps you took for each goal to guide future ones. For unmet goals, identify obstacles. Was the goal too ambitious? Did you require more time? Assess the reasons for not reaching them.

Review Last Month's Budget: Review your monthly budget. Did you stick to it? Examine your income, expenses, and debts; is your budget realistic? Find areas where you could cut back, make more, or save more.

Review Current Routines and Habits: Evaluate your daily routines and habits, such as your morning and evening routines, exercise habits, and eating habits. Do they support your goals and values? Identify areas for improvement.

Reflect on Achievements: Take the time to review and celebrate your achievements and successes, both personal and professional. Did you learn a new skill, reach a goal, or prioritize self-care? Reflecting on your achievements can boost your motivation and provide insights into what strategies worked well.

Assess Challenges and Lessons Learned: Reflect on what you have learned from challenges and setbacks and how they can contribute to your personal development. Were you able to overcome your difficulties, and if so, how? Note what worked and what can be improved.

Gratitude and Appreciation: Reflect on experiences that made you learn and grow, even those that seemed difficult. Appreciate the good things in your life and the people who support you.

Relationships Check-In: Evaluate your relationships -- personal, professional, and social. Evaluate the quality of your connections and whether there are areas that need attention, improvement, or change. Express gratitude to those who have positively impacted your life.

Personal Development Review: Reflect on your personal growth and development. Identify areas where you have made progress and areas where you would like to improve.

Identify Good Habits: Reflect on positive habits that contributed to your well-being and success during the past month. Acknowledge the positive impact of these habits on various aspects of your life.

Acknowledge and Address Bad Habits: Honestly evaluate any habits that may have had a negative impact on your well-being or hindered your progress.

Evaluate Your Performance: Consider your goals and tasks, identifying areas for improvement and leveraging your strengths. Identify personal and professional growth, and how you can improve performance in the future.

Chores and Minutiae: Although the tedium of modern life is rarely addressed, if you do not pay attention to the tiny details, they quickly snowball. Review your passwords, fees, bills, property taxes, license renewals, and other details.

Summary and Insights: Analyze your collected thoughts and experiences. Identify recurring themes, patterns, and areas for potential future growth. Summarize your key takeaways in a concise document or mind map.

Minimum Review: It is not necessary to complete all the reviews listed every month. Be kind to yourself, and be flexible. But find the minimum level of reflection that you want to maintain. Tailor this idea to your own needs. Here are some suggestions for questions to keep in mind:

What Step am I on?
Which section of Knowledge am I working on?
Am I keeping a good Daily Routine?
What were the major events of the previous month?
Am I living in accordance with my values?
How is my mental, physical, and emotional health?
Am I maintaining fulfilling and supportive relationships?
What are my implementation intentions?

Wisd[4.1-04] Plan the New Month

Planning for a New Month: Planning involves brainstorming, goal-setting, budgeting, and organizing your calendar and planner. Create reasonable and achievable SMART goals in accordance with your values.

Brain Dump Everything on Your Mind: Before you set monthly goals or make a budget, do a brain dump. Grab a pen and paper and jot down everything on your mind - events, birthdays, travel plans, shopping needs. This will be your starting point for planning. Use mind maps to visually organize your thoughts and aspirations for creativity and clarity.

Goal Setting for the New Month: Establish clear, realistic goals. Break each goal into small, actionable steps. Cover career, health, relationships, and personal passions. Prioritize; stay organized and motivated. Categorize goals into financial, personal, and professional areas. Set specific, achievable goals for each category. Align these goals with long-term aspirations for overall success.

Make Your Budget: After setting your monthly goals, it is time to create a budget. Examine your income, expenses, and debts. Create a budget to track your finances and ensure that your spending aligns with your goals. Find where you can cut back on expenses and save more. If you have debt, make a plan to pay it off systematically.

Check-in with Your Health and Fitness Routine: Assess your current exercise routine and make adjustments if needed. Find activities you enjoy and can do consistently. Take a look at your eating and sleeping routines. Set reasonable and achievable goals.

Mindfulness and Meditation: Incorporate mindfulness or meditation into your calendar to promote mental clarity and emotional well-being. This can provide a calm space for introspection.

Chores and Minutiae: Create a system to handle all the little things. Put them on your calendar, make a reminder list, or whatever you need to do to make sure all the tiny details of life get taken care of.

Good Habits: Consider how you can reinforce and build on your good habits. By consciously reinforcing these habits, you lay the foundation for lasting positive change, contributing to your overall well-being and development.

Acknowledge and Address Bad Habits: Identify triggers and patterns in your habits. Develop strategies to replace negative habits with healthier alternatives. Set specific, achievable goals, breaking larger objectives into smaller steps. Create a plan to integrate positive habits into your routine.

Challenges: Incorporate challenges into your planning. Start with short challenges, like three days to a week, or even a one-day challenge. Examples include reading (full books or summaries), exercise (pushups, crunches, micro-workouts, consecutive days at the gym), prayer and meditation, learning a new skill, and maintaining a tidy house.

Adapt and Adjust: Be flexible with your goals and plans. Life changes, so adjust as needed. Be adaptable and compassionate to yourself. If you miss a day or two, don't stress; life happens, and adjustments are necessary. Be kind to yourself, resume when ready, and celebrate small achievements.

Track Your Progress: Establish a tracking system to monitor your progress in cultivating both positive and negative habits. Utilize tools such as habit-tracking apps, journals, or visual charts. Review the tracking data to assess your consistency and make necessary adjustments. Be proactive; stay motivated.

Celebrate Successes: Celebrate your achievements in adopting positive habits, recognizing the effort you have invested. Share these successes with friends, family, or a supportive community.

Learn from Problems: When tackling bad habits, analyze root causes and triggers. Learn from setbacks, turning them into opportunities for growth. Adjust your strategies and approaches based on these insights.

Accountability Partners: Consider having an accountability partner or sharing your habit-related goals with someone close to you. Discuss your progress and challenges regularly.

Manageability: Prioritize plans aligning with your goals. Assign specific time blocks for each activity. Stay flexible; adjusting the format as needed. Simplify or rotate focus areas each month if they consume too much time. Treat your days of mindfulness as an evolving practice, gradually refining the process. Combine activities where possible, such as reflection with goal-setting, and aligning personal development goals with habit evaluations. Streamline each step of the process. Set realistic expectations, breaking down large goals into small, manageable milestones. Enjoy the positive experience of self-reflection and personal growth as a meaningful ritual.

Setting Goals and Reminders: Set up daily, weekly, monthly, and annual SMART goals. Track your progress with an app or calendar reminders. Celebrate every success, including "failures" as opportunities to learn. Reassess goals and plans when necessary, maintaining a mindset of commitment, dedication, and a willingness to make positive changes. Allocate time as needed; some weeks may involve deep reflection, while others prioritize goal-setting. Vary the order of your activities to avoid stagnation and complacency. Avoid rigid schedules.

Create Your Monthly Reminders List: Refer back to your brain dump and compile a monthly reminders list. Identify the tasks and activities you want to accomplish during the month. Prioritize them based on importance and urgency. Pin your monthly task list to the side of your calendar or add it to the notes section of your planner.

Setup a Monthly Calendar and Planner: Develop lists or mind maps of your goals and anticipated events for the new month. Use a calendar or planner to organize and plan your activities. Include dates, events, meetings, birthdays, holidays, personal events, appointments, bill due dates, and deadlines. Add recurring, routine tasks like shopping, date nights, cleaning, and laundry. Allocate time for self-care activities like journaling, reading, meditating, and hobbies. Include time for reflection and planning. Select a planner (daily or weekly) to suit your needs. From your reminders list, choose time slots for tasks, and block off appropriate time for tasks requiring multiple days. Break down monthly goals into weekly objectives. Each week, review the past week and plan the coming week. Set priorities on your schedule.

Conclusion

If you think of yourself as a spontaneous person, or if you rebel against structure, these suggestions of reflection and planning may seem restrictive. Remember that they are only guidelines. Think of them as patterns you can arrange your life around. They are meant to make your life easier, not more complicated. Do not attach them to "should", "have to", or "need to". Use them gently, with understanding and self-compassion.

4.1 Leaves of Life

Wisd[4.1-05] The Daily Readings[1]

When you wake up each day, you are given an infinitely precious gift. From the beginning of time until the universe goes dark, it exits only once. That gift is today. It is your own unique and irreplaceable day, a one-time occurrence in all of forever. --TA

You only have today.

Do not regret or idealize yesterday. Yesterday is the graveyard of past events, the paths of memories densely packed by guilt and rumination. In yesterday dwell your shames and sorrows, the roots of resentment, the bitter husks of dead dreams. There lie the faded flowers of lost joys and accomplishments. You cannot erase your mistakes. You cannot recover once happy days. Your memories of yesterday are not yesterday. Yesterday does not exist. You have no claim or control over it. Accept it; forgive it; let go of it; it is gone.

Do not fear or romanticize tomorrow. Do not burden tomorrow with expectations or intentions. It has not yet arrived; it is not yours to decide. Tomorrow will bring its gift or loss in its own time. Your thoughts of tomorrow are not tomorrow. If your fears of tomorrow are false, you punish yourself for nothing. If your expectations of tomorrow are false, you face disappointment. One day, a tomorrow will come without you. Defer nothing and owe nothing to tomorrow. Leave tomorrow to care for itself.

You can only live one day at a time. Live today. All you have is today. You cannot live in yesterday, but your experiences and memories are your treasures. You cannot live in tomorrow, but you can ready yourself with common sense and in good faith. Only today can you make amends for your mistakes. Only today can you make the world better. Do not dwell in yesterday or tomorrow. Gently remind yourself to live in today. This day is a gift, not to be squandered. Make today your best possible day.

Look to this Day,
for it is Life - the very Life of Life.
In its brief course lie all the verities
and realities of your existence:
the Bliss of Growth,
the Glory of Action,
the Splendor of Beauty.
For yesterday is already a dream
and tomorrow is only a vision;
but today, well-lived,
makes every yesterday a dream of happiness
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this Day.
Such is the salutation of the Dawn.
--Sanskrit Poem

---

[1] Inspired by the Twenty-Four Hours A Day book familiar to many in recovery from alcoholism (dates of July 29 – July 31). Thanks to Charlie, AA Member, for relentlessly reminding anyone who listened of the importance of these ideas. I suggest you review this page often or incorporate it into a scheduled reading list.

4.1 Leaves of Life

01 January (Day 1 / 364)

As January dawns, it marks not only the commencement of a new month but also a new year of your life. Let this moment open the blank page to begin this new chapter. Reflect on past years, cherish the lessons learned, and step into the promise of the upcoming twelve months with renewed vigor. Make your aspirations and resolutions realistic, commit to living in accordance with your values, and embrace your Hero's Journey of possibilities and growth.

Old things need not be therefore true,
O brother men, nor yet the new;
Ah! still awhile the old thought retain,
And yet consider it again!
We! what do we see? each a space
Of some few yards before his face;
Does that the whole wide plan explain?
Ah, yet consider it again!
Alas! the great world goes its way,
And takes its truth from each new day;
They do not quit, nor can retain,
Far less consider it again.
--Arthur Hugh Clough

There are two sorts of content; one is connected with exertion, the other habits of indolence. The first is a virtue; the other a vice.
--Maria Edgeworth

Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me: Let them bring me unto thy holy hill, And to thy tabernacles. --Psalm 43. 3

Almighty God, lead me in the search for life. Teach me what is important and what is unimportant; what is false, and what is true. Remove the hindrances that keep me from the worthiest deeds, and grant that I may have the peace that comes with surrender of self to thy will. Amen.

Review Step 1 this month; ZenT[001], Ench[001]

02 January (Day 2 / 363)

To what profit we could use the time for our present task that we spend in impatient waiting and wondering over the future! So often the future is just one step up from the present, but some of us miss it… --M. B. S.

Prepare to live by all means, but for heaven's sake do not forget to live. You will never have a better chance than you have at present. You may think you will have, but you are mistaken. --Arnold Bennett

He that riseth late must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night; while laziness travels so slowly that poverty soon overtakes him. He that lives on hope will die fasting. --Benjamin Franklin

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest.
--Ecclesiastes 9.10

Gracious Father, my heart burns with shame when I think how much I claim, and how little I am. I pray that my body may not cast a shadow today and cloud the light of my life tomorrow. Cleanse the windows of my soul that I may take in thy glory. Amen.

Foun[Part 1-01], Prov[001], Thom[001], Mary[001]

03 January (Day 3 / 362)

To be continually advancing in the paths of knowledge is one of the most pleasing satisfactions of the human mind. These are pleasures perfectly consistent with every degree of advanced years. --Cicero

Fidelity in small things is at the base of every great achievement. We too often forget this and yet no truth needs more to be kept in mind particularly in the troubled eras of history and in the crises of individual life. In shipwreck a splintered beam, an oar, any scrap of wreckage saves us. --Charles Wagner

He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. --Luke 16.10

Almighty God, may I understand that thou art in everything and that I cannot hide from thee, for thou boldest me though I know it not. Give me the desire, and help me to learn of thy laws, that I may know that even in the least of things, I have the liberty to obtain happiness by obeying them. Amen.

Foun[Part 1-02], ZenT[002], Matt[001]

04 January (Day 4 / 361)

Years rush by us like the wind, we see not whence the eddy comes, nor whitherward it is tending, and we seem ourselves to witness their flight without a sense that we are changed: and yet time is beguiling man of his strength, as the winds rob the trees of their foliage. --Sir Walter Scott

The bell strikes one. We take no note of Time
But from its loss. To give it, then a tongue
Is wise in man; as if an angel spoke
I feel the solemn sound. If heard aright
It is the knell of my departed hours:
Where are they?
--Edward Young

Days should speak, and multitudes of years should teach wisdom. And the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding. It is not the great that are wise, nor the aged that understand justice. --Job 32.7, 9

Lord God, help me to see my mistakes, and bring me to the realization of my life. Grant that I may no longer use the time that thou gavest me to learn in, heedlessly, but to give it my best thought and care. Amen.

Foun[Part 1-03], Ench[002], Thom[002], Mary[002]

05 January (Day 5 / 360)

Let me go where'er I will,
I hear a sky-born music still:
It sounds from all things old,
It sounds from all things young,
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,
Peals out a cheerful song.
It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow glows,
Nor in the song of woman heard,
But in the darkest, meanest things
There alway, alway something sings.
'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There alway, alway something sings.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork. --Psalm 19.1

Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Almighty God, grant that my life may no longer be a noise, but be kept in tune with the sublimest melodies, that wherever I am, there may be no discords in the songs of my soul. Through thy loving-kindness may my songs resound. Amen.

Foun[Part 1-04], Prov[002], Thom[003], Mary[003]

06 January (Day 6 / 359)

One of the greatest secrets in life is that of knowing how to soften our uneasiness, and if it be not in our power to disengage ourselves from trouble, to weaken at least the impression of it; without this we must resolve frequently to be miserable, for being exposed to numberless evils, hardly a day passes but we feel some new distress. Now I know of no remedy more effectual than pre-consideration, and whoever has made an exact reflection upon the traverses of life, will find himself at least consolable in his misfortunes. --Amos Wilson, the Pennsylvania Hermit

In the pure heart there is no room left where personal judgments and hatreds can find lodgement, for it is filled to overflowing with tenderness and love; it sees no evil, and only as men succeed in seeing no evil in others will they become free from sin, and sorrow, and suffering. If men only understood that the heart that sins must sorrow, that the hateful mind tomorrow reaps its barren harvest, weeping, starving, resting not, nor sleeping; tenderness would fill their being, they would see with pity's seeing, if they only understood. --James Allen

My Father, help me to be thoughtful and just. May I consider the great truths and broader visions that may not be seen from where I stand. May I be willing to accept a better view. Grant that I may realize that the battle of life is not a sham battle, but a struggle for the advancement of life. Amen.

Know[1.2-01], ZenT[003], Matt[002]

07 January (Day 7 / 358)

Opportunities fly in a straight line, touch us but once and never return, but the wrongs we do others fly in a circle; they come back from the place they started. --T. DeWitt Talmage

Our share of night to bear,
Our share of morning,
Our blank is bliss to fill,
Our blank is scorning.
Here a star, and there a star,
Some lose their way,
Here a mist, and there a mist,
Afterwards--day!
--Emily Dickinson

We find implanted in our minds many virtuous and kind affections, which are overlooked in the hurry of life, and which is our duty to cherish with the utmost care and diligence-he who examines his own heart with attention, will see that it is not a sterile soil-the more he becomes acquainted with his weakness and strength, the more he will see the necessity of exerting the one to assist the other; and with a humble heart, contemplate his own dignity and importance, as a being formed for happiness and morality. --Amos Wilson, the Pennsylvania Hermit

Lord God, may I experience the sweetness that comes in doing the thing that I ought to have done, as well as that in which I took the most pleasure. Help me to so live that my days may be useful, and be recalled with bright and happy recollections. Amen.

Know[1.2-02], Ench[003], Thom[004], Mary[004]

08 January (Day 8 / 357)

A blue bird built his nest
Here in my breast.
"O bird of Light! Whence comest thou?"
Said he, "From God above:
My name is Love."
A mate he brought one day,
Of plumage gray.
"O bird of Night! Why comest thou?"
Said she: "Seek no relief!
My name is Grief."
--Laurence Alma-Tadema

It is not so much resolution as renunciation, not so much courage as resignation, that we need. He that has once yielded thoroughly to God will yield to nothing but God. --John Ruskin

Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he uphold the evildoers. He will yet fill thy mouth with laughter, And thy lips with shouting.
--Job 8.20, 21

Almighty God, help me to understand that peace does not come in rebellion or grieving, but is obtained through the calm of the soul. Grant that if I may be perplexed or worried to-day, I may have the power to control myself and wait in thy strength. Amen.

Know[1.2-03], Prov[003], Thom[005], Mary[005]

09 January (Day 9 / 356)

Wondrous is the strength of cheerfulness; altogether past calculation its powers of endurance. Efforts to be permanently useful must be uniformly joyous--a spirit of all sunshine. --Thomas Carlyle

Honest good humor is the oil and wine of a merry meeting.
--Washington Irving

A laugh is worth a hundred groans in any market. --Charles Lamb.

A glad heart maketh a cheerful countenance; but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken. Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. --Proverbs 15.13, 17

Gracious Father, if I am sorrowing over disappointment and am forgetful, grant that I may see the things thou hast made, for which I should be thankful. Help me to so live that I may have a right to claim a cheerful heart. Amen.

Know[1.3-01], Matt[003], Thom[006]

10 January (Day 10 / 355)

Shall I hold on with both hands to every paltry possession? All I have teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

The practical weakness of the vast mass of modern pity for the poor and the oppressed is precisely that it is merely pity; the pity is pitiful but not respectful. Men feel that the cruelty to the poor is a kind of cruelty to animals. They never feel that it is injustice to equals; nay, it is treachery to comrades.
--G.K. Chesterton

Be ye all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing. --1 Peter 3.8, 9

God of justice, may I pause to remember that while I may do a mean act and keep it hidden from others, I cannot keep it hidden from myself, nor from thee. Help me to have a nobler sense of the quality of life, and less anxiety for the quantity, that I may avoid harshness and selfishness, and be given to tenderness and justice. Amen.

Know[1.3-02], ZenT[004], Ench[004]

11 January (Day 11 / 354)

Be as a flower; content to be, to grow in sweetness day by day. If thou would'st perfect thyself in knowledge, perfect thyself in Love. If thou would'st reach the Highest, ceaselessly cultivate a loving and compassionate heart. To him who chooses Goodness, sacrificing all, is given that which is more than, and includes, all. --James Allen

It is indeed a remarkable fact that sufferings and hardships do not, as a rule, abate the love of life; they seem on the contrary, usually to give it a keener zest; and the sovereign source of melancholy is repletion. Need and struggle are what excite and inspire. Our hour of triumph is what brings the void.
--William James

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him. --James 1.12.

Lord God, I come to thee for help that the small things may not force themselves into my life, and keep me from pursuing the larger things which are continually open to me. May I not be blind to what I may have and be, through inspiration and work. Grant that I may not be satisfied to remain in that in which I have triumphed, but climb to greater endeavors. Amen.

Know[1.4-01], Prov[004], Thom[007]

12 January (Day 12 / 353)

Show the thing you contend for to be reason; show it to be common sense; show it to be the means of attaining some useful end. The question with me is not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is your interest to make them happy. --Edmund Burke

Like the star
That shines afar,
Without haste
And without rest,
Let each man wheel with steady sway
Round the task that rules the day,
And do his best.
--Goethe

Arise, ye, and depart, for this is not your resting place. --Micah 2.10

Gracious Father, cause me to be critical of my life, that I may not be deceived in myself. Help me to look into my soul and see what thou dost find there; and with humility may I acknowledge what I am to thee, and seek thy wisdom. Amen.

Know[1.4-02], Matt[004], Thom[008]

13 January (Day 13 / 352)

Have thy soul feel the universal breath
With which all nature's quick, and learn to be
Sharer in all that thou dost touch or see;
Break from thy body's grasp thy spirit's trance;
Give thy soul air, thy faculties expanse;
Love, joy, even sorrow,--yield thyself to all!
They make thy freedom, groveling, not thy thrall.
Knock off the shackles which thy spirit bind
To dust and sense, and set at large the mind!
Then move in sympathy with God's great whole,
And be like man at first, a _Living Soul_.
--Richard Henry Dana

I was deeply impressed by what a gardener once said to me concerning his work. "I feel, sir," he said, "when I am growing the flowers or rearing the vegetables, that I am having a share in creation." I thought it a very noble way of regarding his work. --J.H. Jowett

Creator of all, help me to see what there is for me to do; and help me to know that I cannot be productive if I am hovering in the choice of my work. May I learn from thy great works of heaven and earth the ways of selection and steadfastness. Give me the desire to work and the confidence that is needed to carry on my work. Amen.

Know[Part 2-01], Ench[005], Thom[009]

14 January (Day 14 / 351)

Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute
What you can do, or dream you can; begin it;
Boldness has genius, power magic in it.
Only engage, and then the mind grows heated;
Begin and then the work will be completed.
--Goethe

Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts.
--Henry W. Longfellow

Choose you this day whom ye will serve;... but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah. --Joshua 24.15

Almighty God, help me to appreciate the sacredness of work while I have it to do. Grant that I may be spared the wretchedness that comes from working with fragments from idleness. May I do my part, even if it be in obscurity and the night overtakes me before it is done. Amen.

Know[Part 2-02], ZenT[005], Prov[005]

15 January (Day 15 / 350)

The sun withholds his generous beam;
Athwart my soul the shadows stream;
The weird winds boisterously blow,
And drift the melancholy snow.
When I, in sorrow and despair,
Expect the storm, with tender care
He rends the clouds and through the blue
The glorious sun breaks forth anew.
--M.B.S.

So with the wan waste grasses on my spear,
I ride forever seeking after God.
My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume
And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes
The star of an unconquerable praise;
For in my soul one hope forever sings,
That at the next white corner of the road
My eyes may look on Him.
--G.K. Chesterton

He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me. --Psalm 18.19

Loving Father, if I may be discouraged to-day, strengthen my faith. May I not weary of waiting for thee, but trust in thy promises. Amen.

Know[Part 2-03], Matt[005], Thom[010]

16 January (Day 16 / 349)

There is no greater happiness than to be occupied with good, whether it be good thoughts, good actions, or good employment; for every good thing is fraught with bliss, and evil cannot enter the heart or house that is tenanted by all that is good. The mind whose doors are guarded by good shuts out unhappiness as the well-sentried garrison shuts out the foe. Unhappiness can only enter through unguarded doors, and even then its power over the tenant is not complete unless it find him occupied with evil. Not to entertain evil thoughts; not to do bad actions; not to engage in worthless or questionable employment, but to resort to good in all things this is the source of supreme happiness. --James Allen

The more a man meditates upon good thoughts, the better will be his world and the world at large. --Confucius

If you don't know where you're going, any road will do. --Lewis Carroll

Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine, figs? Neither can saltwater yield sweet. --James 3.12

Heavenly Father, help me to value my thoughts, words, and deeds. If at the close of the day, there may be one who has been wounded by my injustice, may I be willing to make atonement. May I avoid the ways and words that hurt; and not only wish rightly work rightly, but speak to enrich others with tenderness. Amen.

Know[Part 2-04], Ench[006], Thom[011]

17 January (Day 17 / 348)

Employ thy time well if thou meanest to gain leisure; and since thou art not sure of a minute, throw not away an hour! Leisure is time for doing something useful; this leisure the diligent man will obtain, but the lazy man never; a life of leisure and a life of laziness are two things.
--Benjamin Franklin

There is nothing to gain and everything to lose by despising the example of nature, and making arbitrary rules for oneself. Our liberty wisely understood is but a voluntary obedience to the universal laws of life.
--Amiel

I will meditate on thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
--Psalm 119.15

My Father, help me to understand the power of nature, that I may be willing to obey her laws. I pray that I may so live that my life will proclaim itself without need of boasting or deception. Forbid that I should spend my life in perfecting trifles, and have no leisure to enjoy thy great gifts. Amen.

Know[Part 2-05], Prov[006], Thom[012]

18 January (Day 18 / 347)

We would leave for the consideration of those who shall occupy our places some proof that we hold the blessings transmitted from our fathers in just estimation; some proof of our attachment to the cause of good government and of civil and religious liberty; some proof of a sincere and ardent desire to promote every thing which may enlarge the understanding and improve the hearts of men.
--Daniel Webster

Brother and friend, the world is wide,
But I care not whether there be
The soothing song of a summer tide
Or the thrash of a wintry sea,
If but through shimmer and storm you bide,
Brother and friend, with me.
--Percy C. Ainsworth

Almighty God, I thank thee for all the tender influences of life; for all the gentleness and strength that may be given and received through friendship. Help me to be careful of what I do, for my sake, and for the sake of those who may follow me. Amen.

Know[3.1-01], ZenT[006], Matt[006]

19 January (Day 19 / 346)

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand--
How few! Yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep--while I weep!
O God, can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?
--Edgar Allan Poe

Wait for Jehovah: Be strong, and let thy heart take courage; Yea, wait thou for Jehovah. --Psalm 27.14

What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God. --Hans Urs von Balthasar

Lord God, I pray that if I have struggled for the wrong, and have worked with weak hands, thou wilt forgive me for my lost strength. Give me more light to shine upon my work, upon thy promises, and upon my duties; and with thy wisdom may I search for the truth that is behind every wrong, and for the purpose that is beyond all journeyings. Amen.

Know[3.1-02], Ench[007], Thom[013]

20 January (Day 20 / 345)

How like a mounting devil in the heart
Rules the unreigned ambition! Let it once
But play the monarch, and its haughty brow
Glows with a beauty that bewilders thought
And unthrones peace forever. Putting on
The very pomp of Lucifer, it turns
The heart to ashes.
--Nathaniel P. Willis

Temperance, in the nobler sense, does not mean a subdued and imperfect energy; it does not mean a stopping short in any good thing, as love or in faith; but it means the power which governs the most intense energy, and prevents its acting in any way but as it ought. --John Ruskin

And thy gentleness hath made me great. --Psalm 18.35

Gracious Father, I pray that I may be willing to profit by the experience of great teachers, and appreciate the value of strong principles. May I too live for the higher ideals of life, and add virtue to other lives. Amen.

Know[3.1-03], Prov[007], Thom[014]

21 January (Day 21 / 344)

So long as we love we serve; so long as we are loved by others I would almost say that we are indispensable; and no man is useless while he has a friend.
--Robert L. Stevenson.

So to the calmly gathered thought
The innermost of life is taught,
The mystery dimly understood,
That love of God is love of good:
That to be saved is only this--
Salvation from our selfishness.
--John Greenleaf Whittier

Tender Father, may I not attempt to serve life for my own gratification. May I not interpret love through vanity, but from reality. Make me worthwhile, that I may be relied upon for my pledges, and needed for my services. Amen.

Know[3.1-04], Matt[007], Thom[015]

22 January (Day 22 / 343)

Father of light! to thee I call,
My soul is dark within:
Thou who canst mark the sparrow's fall,
Avert the death of sin,
Thou who canst guide the wandering star,
Who calm'st the elemental war,
Whose mantle is yon boundless sky,
My thoughts, my words, my crimes forgive;
And since I soon must cease to live,
Instruct me how to die.
--Lord Byron

Knowledge, whether it descend from divine inspiration or spring from human sense, would soon perish and vanish to oblivion if it were not preserved in books, traditions, conferences, and places appointed. --Francis Bacon

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein. --Revelation 1.3

Almighty God, I would have thy counsel as I read the words and follow the deeds of helpful lives, that I may be inspired to nobler activities. Give me the desire to know more of thy holy word, that I may have a better knowledge of life. Amen.

Know[3.1-05], ZenT[007], Ench[008]

23 January (Day 23 / 342)

Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful. Welcome it in every fair face, every fair sky, every fair flower, and thank Him for it, who is the fountain of all loveliness. --Charles Kingsley

Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege
Through all the years of this life, to lead,
From joy to joy; for she can so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Nor all the dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.
--William Wordsworth

Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are! And thou sayest, What doth God know? Can he judge through the thick darkness? --Job 22.12, 13

Lord God, I pray that I may not overlook thy blessings of beauty while endeavoring to perform my duties. Guide me that I may not struggle to be where thou wouldst not have me go. Amen.

Know[3.1-06], Prov[008], Thom[016]

24 January (Day 24 / 341)

The great Gods pass through the great Time-hall,
Stately and high;
The little men climb the low clay wall
To gape and spy;
"We wait for the Gods," the little men cry,
"But these are our brothers passing by."
The great Gods pass through the great Time-hall;
Who can see?
The little men nod by the low clay wall,
So tired they be;
"Tis weary waiting for Gods," they yawn,
'There's a world o' men, but the Gods are gone."
--A.H. Begbie

But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. --Luke 24.16

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind. --Albert Einstein

My Father, may I be careful of getting weary and missing the best through the need of rest. Intensify my desire for the songs and glorious ways, that I may not settle into dullness and slumber, while others pass on in the light. I pray for a keener sense of the possessions made possible by the deeds and cares of noble men and women. Amen.

Know[3.1-07], Matt[008], Thom[017]

25 January (Day 25 / 340)

When ranting round in pleasure's ring
Religion may be blinded:
Or if she give a random sting,
It may be little minded:
But when on life we're Tempest-driv'n--
A conscience but a canker,
A correspondence fixed wi' Heav'n,
Is sure a noble anchor.
--Robert Burns

Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever;
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long:
And so make life, death, and that vast forever
One grand sweet song.
--Charles Kingsley

O Lord, by these things men live; and wholly therein is the life of my spirit:
Wherefore recover thou me, and make me to live. --Isaiah 38.16

Gracious Father, grant that I may not be willing to spend my life for trivial needs, for thou dost measure me for what I am. Be with me in my judgment of what is best, that I may make the most of my life. Amen.

Know[3.1-08], Ench[009], Thom[018]

26 January (Day 26 / 339)

Ave Maria! blessed be the hour,
That time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft
Have felt that moment in its fullest power
Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower
Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer.
--Lord Byron.

For in the day of trouble he will keep me secretly in his pavilion: In the covert of his tabernacle will he hide me; He will lift me up upon a rock.
--Psalm 27. 5.

Your sacred space is where you can find yourself over and over again.
-- Joseph Campbell

Heavenly Father, teach me how to breathe in the sweetness of life. Reveal to me the life that will bring peace to the soul. May I not be dismayed, but find the perfect peace that comes from thee. Amen.

Know[3.1-09], Prov[009], Thom[019]

27 January (Day 27 / 338)

To keep young, every day read a poem, hear a choice piece of music, view a fine painting, and, if possible, do a good action. Man's highest merit always is, as much as possible, to rule external circumstances, and as little as possible to let himself be ruled by them. --Goethe

Let us not always say,
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more now than flesh helps soul!"
--Robert Browning

Surely goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life.
--Psalm 23.6

Loving Father, help me to foresee that it is what I care for today that determines how I will find old age. May I not bring my closing years to weariness and lonesomeness, but may I have the restfulness of communing with thee. Amen.

Know[3.1-10], ZenT[008], Matt[009]

28 January (Day 28 / 337)

He only is advancing in life whose heart is getting softer, whose blood warmer, whose brain quicker, and whose spirit is entering into living peace. And the men who have this life in them are the true lords and kings of the earth--they, and they only. --John Ruskin

Just where you stand in the conflict,
There is your place!
Just where you think you are useless,
Hide not your face!
God placed you there for a purpose,
What e'er it be;
Think you he has chosen you for it:
Work loyally.
--Anonymous

My Father, I thank thee that thou hast endowed me with a will; help me to use it aright. May I have the knowledge of what thou dost demand of my soul. Help me that I may reach out for the highest ideals of life. Amen.

Know[3.1-11], Ench[010], Thom[020]

29 January (Day 29 / 336)

Character is what you do when no one is watching. --Paul Rabil

Reputation is what men and women think of us; character is what God
and the angels know of us. --Thomas Paine

The reward of one duty is the power to fulfill another. --George Eliot

Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So shall we not go back from thee: Quicken thou us, and we will call upon thy name. --Psalm 80.17, 18.

My Father, I pray that I may be just and be given to kindness. May I be conscious of my virtues, and use them to overcome my faults. May I hear clearly thy call that I may be sure of the way to duty and happiness. Amen.

Know[3.1-12], Prov[010], Thom[021]

30 January (Day 30 / 335)

Why, why repine, my pensive friend,
At pleasures slipped away?
Some the stern fates will never lend,
And all refuse to stay.
I see the rainbow in the sky,
The dew upon the grass;
I see them and I ask not why
They glimmer or they pass.
With folded arms I linger not
To call them back; 'twere vain;
In this, or in some other spot,
I know they'll shine again.
--Walter Savage Landor

When disappointment comes meet it, but do not carry it along with you; nor fetter your spirit by changeless haste. "Memory will always pursue some precious instance of itself," which will bring either renewed confidence or resignation.
--M. B. S.

For thou shalt forget thy misery; Thou shalt remember it as waters that are passed away. --Job 11.16

We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. --T.S. Eliot

Gracious Father, help me to "Lift mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help". May I appreciate thy great love, and from my limitations find the possibilities that are limitless. Amen.

Know[3.1-13], Matt[010], Thom[022]

31 January (Day 31 / 334)

Nature demands that man be ever at the top of his condition. He who violates her laws must pay the penalty, though he sit on a throne.
--James G. Elaine

Dig channels for the streams of love,
Where they may broadly run;
And love has overflowing streams
To fill them every one.
For we must share if we must keep
The good things from above;
Ceasing to give, we cease to have--
Such is the law of love.
--R. C. Trench

And thy life shall be clearer than the noonday; though there be darkness, it shall be as the morning. --Job 11.17

My Father, I would remember that it is mostly from my inspirations that I conceive life. Take away hatred and vanity that keep me in faults, and awake in me the thoughts that are responsible for visions that lead to high ideals. Amen.

Know[3.2-01], ZenT[009], Ench[011]

Revel in your achievements, glean wisdom from missteps, and treasure the moments, good and bad. All have value, simply because they were yours. Now, with the dawn of a new month, turn your aspirations into tangible goals and relish the prospect of fresh experiences.

01 February (Day 32 / 333)

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:
A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night--
It was the plant and flower of Light.
In small proportions we just beauties see;
And in short measure life may perfect be.
--Ben Jonson

There are four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the lizard taketh hold with her hands, yet is she in king's palaces.
--Proverbs 30.24-28

My heart is so small it's almost invisible. How can You place such big sorrows in it? "Look," He answered, "your eyes are even smaller, yet they behold the world." --Rumi

Creator of all, lead me to see the light, and instruct me that I may be able to reason. Guard me against spectacular endeavors, that I may be genuine. Amen.

Review Step 2 (and Step 2 ½) this month; Prov[011], Thom[023]

02 February (Day 33 / 332)

'Twas doing nothing was his curse--
Is there a vice can plague us worse?
The wretch who digs the mine for bread,
Or plows, that others may be fed,
Feels less fatigue than that decreed
To him who cannot think, or read.
Not all the peril of temptations,
Not all the conflict of the passions,
Can quench the spark of Glory's flame,
Or quite extinguish Virtue's name.
--Hannah More

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.
--Sir Walter Scott

He went out, and found others standing; and he saith unto them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" They say unto him, "Because no man hath hired us." He saith unto them, "Go ye also into the vineyard." --Matthew 20.6, 7

Eternal God, who hath weighed the mountains and measured the seas, I pray that I may not be satisfied to wait in idleness, and let thy wisdom pass away from me as the days. Steady me in my weakness, and reveal to me my strength as I draw near and ask of thee. Amen.

Know[3.2-02], Matt[011], Thom[024]

03 February (Day 34 / 331)

My soul is sailing through the sea,
But the past is heavy and hindereth me.
The past hath crusted cumbrous shells
That hold the flesh of cold sea-mells
About my soul.
The huge waves wash, the high waves roll,
Each barnacle clingeth and worketh dole
And hindereth me from sailing.
--Sidney Lanier

To stand with a smile upon your face, against a stake from which you cannot get away--that no doubt is heroic. True glory is resignation to the inevitable. But to stand unchained, with perfect liberty to go away held only by the higher chains of duty, and let the fire creep up to the heart--that is heroism. --F.W. Robertson

Gracious Father, thou knowest what I am and the condition of my life. May I seek thy will for me. Grant that I may never struggle for consolation through indulgence and indolence, but in my sorrow and failure may I reach out for thy enduring comfort. Amen.

Know[3.2-03], Ench[012], Thom[025]

04 February (Day 35 / 330)

Life is not a May-game, but a battle and a march, a warfare with principalities and powers. No idle promenade through fragrant orange groves and green flowery spaces, waited on by coral muses, and the rosy hours; it is a stern pilgrimage through the rough, burning, sandy solitudes, through regions of thick-ribbed ice. --Thomas Carlyle

For all sweet and pleasant passages in the great story of life men may well thank God; for leisure and ease and health and friendship may God make us truly and humbly grateful; but our chief song of thanksgiving must be always for our kinship with him, with all that such divinity of greatness brings of peril, hardship, toil, and sacrifice. --Hamilton Mabie

Thy bars shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.
--Deuteronomy 33.25

My Father, help me to choose the road that leads to my work, and may I not fail to reach it. Keep me in touch with the human side of life, holding in mind that "Truth and honesty are the noblest works of God." Amen.

Know[3.2-04], ZenT[010], Prov[012]

05 February (Day 36 / 329)

When a great man dies, then has the time come for putting us in mind that he was alive! --Thomas Carlyle

If I practice one day, I can see the result. If I practice two days, my friends can see it. If I practice three days, the great public can see it. --Ole Bull

Those who say they will forgive but can't forget an injury simply bury the hatchet while they leave the handle out, ready for immediate use.
--Dwight L. Moody

But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course. --Acts 20.24

Everything in Nature contains all the powers of Nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

Almighty God, if I am uncertain, and tremble at the crossroads in doubt of the right way, may I wait and be led by thee, and follow on, even if the way be dark and rough. May I be faithful and have thy presence as thou promised. Amen.

Know[3.2-05], Matt[012], Thom[026]

06 February (Day 37 / 328)

Nothing earthly will make me give up my work in despair. I encourage myself in the Lord my God and go forward. --David Livingstone

To expect defeat is nine tenths of defeat itself. --Marion Crawford

I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

Art is a jealous mistress, she requires the whole man. --Michael Angelo

Almighty God, help me to have true conceptions, that my life may not be secured to needless purposes. May my soul be influenced by high ideals, and my work be the production of truth and not of selfishness. Protect me from evil that I may be kept pure and strong for my work. Amen.

Know[3.2-06], Ench[013], Thom[027]

07 February (Day 38 / 327)

Let no man turn aside ever so slightly, from the broad path of honor, on the plausible pretense that he is justified by the goodness of his end. All good ends can be worked out by good means. --Charles Dickens

Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.
--Henry David Thoreau

If evils come not, then our fears are vain;
And if they do, fear but augments the pain.
--Sir Thomas More

A human heart knows aught of littleness,
Suspects no man, compares with no one's ways,
Hath in one hour most glorious length of days,
A recompense, a joy, a loveliness;
Like eaglet keen, shoots into azure far,
And always dwelling nigh is the remotest star.
--William Ellery Channing

Gracious Father, I pray that thou wilt control my impulses, and protect me from false interpretations. May I have wisdom, and search for the high and holy ways. Help me to be patient for thy purposes, and may my relations to life be triumphant in thy standards. Amen.

Know[3.2-07], Prov[013], Thom[028]

08 February (Day 39 / 326)

If you want knowledge, you must toil for it; and if pleasure, you must toil for it. Toil is the law. Pleasure comes through toil, and not by self-indulgence and indolence. When one gets to love work his life is a happy one.
--John Ruskin

Whatever sceptic could inquire for,
For every why he had a wherefore.
--Samuel Butler

Through love to light! O wonderful the way,
That leads from darkness to the perfect day!
From darkness and from sorrow of the night
To morning that comes singing o'er the sea.
Through love to light! through light O God to Thee!
Who art the love, the eternal light of light!
--Richard Watson Gilder

We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. --John 9.4

My Father, I pray that I may not weight my life with worthless efforts. May I be guided to the right work, and find strength for my soul. Amen.

Know[3.2-08], Matt[013], Thom[029]

09 February (Day 40 / 325)

A man's own observation, what he finds good of, and what he finds hurt of, is the best physic to preserve health. But it is a safer conclusion to say, "This agreeth not well with me, therefore I will not continue it"; than to say, "I find no offense of this, therefore I may use it." For strength of nature in youth passeth over many excesses, which are owing a man till his age. --Francis Bacon

Though man a thinking being is defined,
Few use the grand prerogative of mind.
How few think justly of the thinking few!
How many never think, who think they do!
--Jane Taylor

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life. --James 1.12

Almighty God, I would learn that while thou art a forgiving Lord, nature has no mercy on them that break her laws. Forgive me for all my neglect, and help me to see the way in which thou hast through mercy led me. Give me the power to endure and the strength to resist temptation. May I seek to understand thy laws, that I may not fail through ignorance. Amen.

Know[3.2-09], ZenT[011], Ench[014]

10 February (Day 41 / 324)

Never let the most well-intended falsehood escape your lips; for Heaven, which is entirely Truth, will make the seed which you have sown of untruth to yield miseries a thousandfold. --Charles Lamb

We cannot command veracity at will; the power of seeing and reporting truly is a form of health that has to be distinctly guarded, and as an ancient rabbi has solemnly said, "The penalty of untruth is untruth." --George Eliot

The bat hangs upside down and laughs at a topsy-turvy world. --Unknown

The lip of truth shall be established for ever; But a lying tongue is but for a moment. --Proverbs 12.19

Lord God, give me the will to hold to the truth, and may I help others to look up and catch the truth from the purest light. Amen.

Know[3.2-10], Prov[014], Thom[030]

11 February (Day 42 / 323)

Few, in the days of early youth,
Trusted like me in love and truth.
I've learned sad lessons from the years;
But slowly and with many tears;
For God made me to kindly view
The world that I was passing through.
And all who tempt a trusting heart
From faith and hope to drift apart,
May they themselves be spared the pain
Of losing power to trust again!
God help us all to kindly view
The world that we are passing through!
--Lydia M. Child

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. --Isaiah 55.12

Lord God, I pray that I may not rest my hope in self alone, but know that the greatest joy is in the hope of the world, and in you. Help me to have faith, and with a loyal heart and a brave spirit be as kind to the world as I can. Amen.

Know[3.2-11], Matt[014], Thom[031]

12 February (Day 43 / 322)

The great moral combat between human life and each human soul must be single.... When a soul arms for battle she goes forth alone. --Owen Meredith

A note does not make a song. A day does not make a good or bad life. --TA

Teach me thy way, O Jehovah; I will walk in thy truth: Unite my heart to fear thy name. --Psalm 86.11

Almighty God, I thank thee for the courage that comes with a great life. Help me to be brave, even if it is only that others may be blest. May I lay a careful foundation and plan to build the best that I can afford. Amen.

Know[3.2-12], Ench[015], Thom[032]

13 February (Day 44 / 321)

A man is not his hope, nor yet his despair, nor yet his past deed. We know not yet what we have done; still less what we are doing. Wait till evening, and other parts of our work will shine than we had thought at noon, and we shall discover the real purport of our toil. --Henry D. Thoreau

When you make a mistake don't look back at it long. Take the reason of the thing into your mind, and look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom.... The past cannot be changed. The future is yet in your power. --Hugh White

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him. --Psalm 126.6

My Father, help me to survey my life. Make me compassionate and considerate, that I may be qualified to promote that which is helpful. May I appreciate that what is worth keeping I can obtain from thee. Amen.

Know[3.2-13], ZenT[012], Prov[015]

14 February (Day 45 / 320)

In speaking of self-control, one is easily misunderstood. It should not be associated with a destructive repression, but with a constructive expression. A man is happy, wise and great in the measure that he controls himself; he is wretched, foolish, and mean in the measure that he allows his animal nature to dominate his thoughts and actions. He who controls himself, controls his life, his circumstances, his destiny; and wherever he goes he carries his happiness with him as an abiding possession. Renunciation precedes regeneration. The permanent happiness which men seek in dissipation, excitement, and abandonment to unworthy pleasures, is found only in the life which reverses all this—the life of self-control. --James Allen

No man is free who is not master of himself. --Epictetus

A disciplined mind brings happiness. --Buddha

Divine Presence, help me to exercise self-control and gentle self-discipline. Guide me to act in accordance with reason and virtue, and to overcome my negative habits and impulses. Grant me strength to resist temptation, and guide me to do the next right thing. Amen.

Know[3.2-14], Matt[015], Thom[033]

15 February (Day 46 / 319)

The night I know is nigh at hand,
The mists lie low on hill and bay,
The autumn sheaves are brown and dry,
But I have had the day.
Yes, I have had, dear Lord, the day.
When at thy call I have the night
Brief be the twilight as I pass
From light to dark, from dark to light.
--S. Weir Mitchell

If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small… for the day of adversity is its first real opportunity. --Maltbie Babcock

My Father, may my daily work not be the means of separating me from thee, but may I have thee for my companion through my work. May I be blest and grow strong as my spirit lives in thee. Amen.

Know[3.2-15], Ench[016], Thom[034]

16 February (Day 47 / 318)

Thy love shall chant its own beatitudes
After its own life working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad.
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest.
--Elizabeth B. Browning

Ask nothing more of me, sweet;
All I can give you I give.
Heart of my heart, were it more,
More would be laid at your feet:
Love that should help you to live,
Song that should help you to soar.
--Algernon Charles Swinburne

All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them. --Matthew 7.12

In fields of February snow, where the world lies still and white,
soft petals bloom against the chill, where the cheri blossoms grow.
--Anonymous

Lord God, I pray that I may not neglect the help and happiness that I may give with compassion and love. Make me strong in all the senses that answer to the call of humanity. Amen.

Know[3.2-16], Prov[016], Thom[035]

17 February (Day 48 / 317)

It is not much
To give a gentle word or kindly touch
To one gone down
Beneath the world's cold frown,
And yet who knows
How great a thing from such a little grows?
O, oftentimes,
Some brother upward climbs
And hope again
Uplifts its head, that in the dust had lain,
Gives place to morning's light.
--E. H. Divall

I will seek that which was lost, and will bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick. --Ezekiel 34.16

Re-examine all you have been told. Dismiss what insults your soul.
--Walt Whitman

My Father, may I not sorrow so that I fail to comfort the sorrowing, and may I not be so happy that I fail to see that others need to be glad. I thank thee for thy providences. May I serve thee in helping others to brighter lives. Amen.

Know[3.2-17], Matt[016], Thom[036]

18 February (Day 49 / 316)

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing:
Our helper he amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great:
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.
--Martin Luther.

Let us stand by our duty fearlessly and effectively. I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light that I have. --Abraham Lincoln

Jehovah is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; My God, my rock, in whom I will take refuge. --Psalm 18. 2

Lord God, help me to lay my life in the rocks of thy foundation, and not in moving sands which are tossed from shore to shore. May I cling to the rock that was cleft for me and trust for thy care. Amen.

Know[3.2-18], ZenT[013], Ench[017]

19 February (Day 50 / 315)

So mine are these new fruitings rich,
The simple to the common brings;
I keep the youth of souls who pitch
Their joy in this old heart of things;
Full lasting is the song, though he
The singer passes; lasting too,
For souls not lent in usury,
The rapture of the forward view.
--George Meredith

All deep things are Song. It seems, somehow, the very central essence of us, Song; as if all the rest were wrappages and hulls! the primal element of us; of us, and all things. --Thomas Carlyle

Ye shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come unto the mountain of Jehovah.
--Isaiah 30.29

Lord God, help me to feel the power of praise. "As words without thoughts never to heaven go," so the highest praises are never sung alone, but rendered with service and love. May I have the heart to sing thy praises far and near, and rejoice in him from whom all blessings flow. Amen.

Know[3.2-19], Prov[017], Thom[037]

20 February (Day 51 / 314)

Philosophy always requires something more, requires the eternal, the true, in contrast to which even the fullest existence as such is but a happy moment.
--Soren Kierkegaard

Lo, Spring comes forth with all her warmth and love,
She brings sweet justice from the realms above;
She breaks the chrysalis, she resurrects the dead;
Two butterflies ascend encircling her head.
And so this emblem shall forever be
A sign of immortality.
--Joseph Jefferson

Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.
--Psalm 73.24

Lord God, I pray that I may not neglect my soul in trying to fathom immortal life. If I may be hesitating between comfort and work, remind me of the greatness of the place which I started to reach. May I not grow weary of climbing and falter on the stair. Breathe upon me thy inspiration and love, that I may continue in faith all the way. Amen.

Know[3.2-20], Matt[017], Thom[038]

21 February (Day 52 / 313)

Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng;
They will condense within thy soul,
And change to purpose strong.
--John H. Newman

Think truly, and thy thoughts
Shall the world's famine feed;
Speak truly, and each word of thine
Shall be a fruitful seed;
Live truly, and thy life shall be
A great and noble creed.
--Horatio Bonar

We ought to love everybody and make everybody love us. Then everything else is easy. --Alice Freeman Palmer

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of Jehovah shall be thy reward. --Isaiah 58.8

Almighty God, look upon me with pity; so often I have obeyed the thoughts that have been misleading and profitless. Make me more careful of what I think and say, and may I learn from my mistakes the forbidden paths. Help me to keep my mind in unity with thy will. Amen.

Know[3.2-21], Ench[018], Thom[039]

22 February (Day 53 / 312)

Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience. --George Washington

Life is a sheet of paper white
Whereon each one of us may write
His word or two, and then comes night.
Greatly begin! though thou hast time
But for a line, be that sublime.
Not failure, but low aim is crime.
--James Russell Lowell

God keep us through the common days,
The level stretches white with dust,
When thought is tired, and hands upraise
Their burdens feebly since they must;
In days of slowly fretting care
Then most we need the strength of prayer.
--Margaret E. Sangster

Lord God, help me to realize the influence of the individual life. And as I would care for my own, may I seek to do for others; and may I not criticize, but help all who are trying to make the world better. Amen.

Know[3.2-22], ZenT[014], Prov[018]

23 February (Day 54 / 311)

Labor is life! 'tis the still water faileth;
Idleness ever despaireth, bewaileth:
Keep the watch wound, or the dark rust assaileth;
Flowers droop and die in the stillness of noon.
Labor is glory! the flying cloud lightens;
Only the waving wing changes and brightens,
Idle hearts only the dark future frightens,
Play the sweet keys, wouldst thou keep them in tune.
--Frances S. Osgood

Palled death, with kisses ghostly,
Wooed and won him while too young,
And the world reveres him mostly,
For the songs he might have sung.
--Samuel A. Wood

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.
--Isaiah 542

Almighty God, I pray for the will to do my finest work. Disclose to me if I am being detained by serving selfishness in myself or in others. Lead me to what is right for me to do; and may I diligently tarry in it. Amen.

Know[3.2-23], Matt[018], Thom[040]

24 February (Day 55 / 310)

'Tis not to enjoy that we exist,
For that end only; something must be done;
I must not walk in unreproved delight
These narrow bounds, and think of nothing more,
No duty that looks further and no care.
--William Wordsworth

We weave our thoughts into heart-spun plans,
And weave secure for a fitful day,
But lose in the web of earthly things
The pattern of sublimity.
Shall days spring up as wild vines grow,
Unheeding where they climb or cling?
Consider, child, before you sow,
And wait not until harvesting.
--M.B.S.

Jehovah is my strength and my shield; my heart hath trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him. --Psalm 28.7

Loving Father, command my judgment for the influences which I permit to come into my life. Grant that I may not delay my purposes for the lack of comforts which are so often made more than life. With thy strength may I be steadfast in what I would achieve. Amen.

Know[3.2-24], Ench[019], Thom[041]

25 February (Day 56 / 309)

In general, pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes. All other
passions do occasionally good; but wherever pride puts in its word
everything goes wrong. --John Ruskin

He that is proud eats up himself: pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle; and whatever praises itself but in the deed, devours the deed in the praise. --William Shakespeare

Save me alike from foolish pride
Or impious discontent;
At aught Thy wisdom hath denied,
Or aught Thy wisdom lent.
--Alexander Pope

A man's pride shall bring him low; But he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honor. --Proverbs 29.23

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may not let pride keep me down when it may be mine to be carried to the heights. With tenderness take me out of myself, that I may see how pride deceives, and destroys an humble spirit. Help me to master both stubbornness and pride. Amen.

Know[3.2-25], Prov[019], Thom[042]

26 February (Day 57 / 308)

When I go down to the grave I can say, like so many others, I have finished my work; but I cannot say I have finished my life; my day's work will begin again the next morning. My tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes in the twilight to open in the dawn. --Victor Hugo

There's nothing bright above, below,
From flowers that bloom to stars that glow,
But in the light my soul can see
Some feature of the Deity.
There's nothing dark below, above,
But in its gloom I trace God's love,
And meekly wait that moment when
His truth shall turn all bright again.
--Thomas Moore

Jehovah redeemeth the soul of his servants; And none of them that take refuge in him shall be condemned. --Psalm 34.22

Contentment is a virtue which becomes lofty and spiritual in its later developments, as the mind is trained to perceive and the heart to receive the guidance, in all things, of a merciful law. To be contented does not mean to forego effort; it means to free effort from anxiety; it does not mean to be satisfied with sin and ignorance and folly, but to rest happily in duty done, work accomplished. --James Allen

Lord God, may I not only feel the need of thee when I am burdened with sorrow and care, but may I have need of thee in my pleasures and joys. I thank thee for thy gracious kindness, thy mercy and thy protection. Amen.

Know[3.2-26], ZenT[015], Matt[019]

27 February (Day 58 / 307)

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time--
Footprints that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's wintry main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.
--Henry W. Longfellow

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.
--James Russell Lowell

Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. --Matthew 5. 16

Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.
--Mark Twain

Merciful Father, help me to know that my shadow cannot fall without me, and that my footprints cannot be found where I have never trodden. I pray that thou wilt make me so familiar with the right path that it may be mine to have the privilege of leading others to the right places. Amen.

Know[3.2-27], Ench[020], Thom[043]

28 February (Day 59 / 306)

Soul, rule thyself; on passion, deed, desire,
Lay thou the laws of thy deliberate will.
Stand at thy chosen post, Faith's sentinel:
Though Hell's lost legions ring thee round with fire,
Learn to endure.
--Arthur Symonds

The confidence in another man's virtue is no slight evidence of a man's own, and God willingly favors such a confidence. --Montaigne

Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, even then will I be confident. --Psalm 27.3

My Father, may I ever be kept in remembrance of my virtue, and may I be sensitive to its strength. As I go on my way, keep me within control of the impetuous desires of my nature, and in call of the duties and obligations of my daily life. Amen.

Know[3.2-28], Prov[020], Thom[044]

29 February

Embrace the specialness of 29 February by creating memorable moments, whether by revisiting cherished memories, setting new goals, or simply indulging in activities that bring you joy. Use this quadrennial day to pause, appreciate the exceptional nature of time, and make it a memorable milestone in your personal journey. By revisiting your past and present every four years on this day, you create a narrative of your life. Where were you four years ago? Where will you be four years from now?

Happy is he and more than wise
Who sees with wondrous eyes and clean
This world through all the gray disguise
Of sleep and custom in between.
--G.K. Chesterton.

In the morning, when thou findest thyself unwilling to rise, consider with thyself presently, if it is to go about a man's work that I am stirred up. Or was I made for this, to lay me down, and make much of myself in a warm bed.
--Marcus Aurelius.

Arise and be doing, and Jehovah be with thee. --1 Chronicles 22. 16.

Gracious Father, help me to take of the wealth of my day, while it is in season, and accessible. May I not be ignorant of the abundance in which I live, and be found in overwhelming regret. Forgive me for all that I have missed in life, and make me more watchful of that which is to come. Amen.

With the month's end, you close this chapter of your life. Grant yourself a moment of reflection. Cherish victories, understand defeats, and gather the treasures from each day. Embrace the new month as a glorious adventure, teeming with potential and possibilities. Chart your course, and let the journey continue with purpose.

01 March (Day 60 / 305)

Thy soul shall enter on its heritage
Of God's unuttered wisdom. Thou shalt sweep
With hand assured the ringing lyre of life,
Till the fierce anguish of its bitter strife,
Its pain, death, discord, sorrow, and despair,
Break into rhythmic music. Thou shalt share
The prophet-joy that kept forever glad
God's poet-souls when all a world was sad.
Enter and live! Thou hast not lived before.
--S. Weir Mitchell

Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for Jehovah hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. --Psalm 116.7, 8

To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms - this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. --Albert Einstein

Almighty God, grant that I may never be so discouraged that I feel my life has been spent. Help me to so live, that I may not follow into hopeless days, but look for the bright and beautiful in to-morrow. Forgive me for all that I have asked for and accepted through willful judgment, and make me more careful in selecting my needs. Amen.

Review Step 3 this month; Matt[020], Thom[045]

02 March (Day 61 / 306)

Nature never says one thing, wisdom another. --Juvenal

By all means, use some times to be alone;
Salute thyself--see what thy soul doth wear;
Dare to look in thy chest, for 'tis thine own,
And tumble up and down what thou findest there.
--William Wordsworth

Lonesomeness is part of the cost of power. The higher you climb, the less can you hope for companionship. The heavier and the more immediate the responsibility, the less can a man delegate his tasks or escape his own mistakes.
--Shailer Mathews

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee. --Matthew 6.6

We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined.
--N. Scott Momaday

My Father, I pray that thou wilt take care of my thoughts when I am alone and tired, and keep them strong and clean. Grant that while I commune with thee I may yield to my needs and be restored with keener energy for worthier deeds. May I ask of thy wisdom every day. Amen.

Know[3.2-29], ZenT[016], Ench[021]

03 March (Day 62 / 303)

Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high,
So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be;
Sink not in spirit: who aimeth at the sky,
Shoots higher than he that means a tree.
--George Herbert

We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled. --William James

Almighty God, help me to remember that "the power of character is the highest point of success," and that thou hast put within reach of all the choice ideals of life. May I have the desire to cultivate strong purposes, and strive for high endeavors, that I may not aim for the low. Amen.

Know[3.2-30], Prov[021], Thom[046]

04 March (Day 63 / 302)

It is perfectly obvious that men do necessarily absorb, out of the influences in which they grow up, something which gives a complexion to their whole after-character. --Anthony Froude

All common things, each day's events
That with the hour begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents
Are rounds by which we may ascend.
--Henry W. Longfellow

Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt. --Shakespeare

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth. --1 Samuel 17.49

There is a fire inside. Sit down beside it. Watch the flames, the ancient, flickering dance of yourself. --John MacEnulty

My Father, I would remember that my life may decline from the neglect of small things; for as thou dost nourish the wheat from flakes of snow, and supply the springs from drops of rain, so thou wilt strengthen my soul from every little blessing. Amen.

Know[3.2-31], Matt[021], Thom[047]

05 March (Day 64 / 301)

When I have the time so many things I'll do,
To make life happier and more fair
For those whose lives are crowded now with care,
I'll help to lift them from their low despair
When I have time.
When I have time the friend I love so well
Shall know no more the weary, toiling days;
I'll lead his feet in pleasant paths always,
And cheer his heart with words of sweetest praise,
When I have time.
Now is the time! Speed, friend; no longer wait
To scatter loving smiles and words of cheer
To those around whose lives are drear;
They may not need you in the far-off year:
Now is the time.
--Unknown

Once, I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was myself. Soon I awakened, and there I was, myself again. Was I a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or am I now a butterfly, dreaming that I am a man. --Zhuangzi

Lord God, teach me this day to know that the veriest trifle often keeps happiness alive. I pray that thou wilt put within my heart that touch of love, which brings consideration for others, and the care that brings the greatest happiness. Amen.

Know[3.2-32], Ench[022], Thom[048]

06 March (Day 65 / 300)

Beloved, let us love so well
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work:
And both commended for the sake of each
By all true workers and true lovers born.
--Elizabeth B. Browning

Earth saddens, never shall remove,
Affections purely given;
And e'en that mortal grief shall prove
The immortality of love,
And heighten it with heaven.
--Elizabeth B. Browning

Loving Father, I pray that I may not try to change the standard of love by grafting on my own selfishness and infirmities. May I remember that it is mostly for gratification that love is held to the base in life; may I follow it to the summits, where it is divine. Amen.

Know[3.2-33], ZenT[017], Prov[022]

07 March (Day 66 / 299)

Earth gets its price for what it gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
The priest has his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;
At the devil's booth are all things sold,
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking;
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking.
--James Russell Lowell

We are our own fates. Our own deeds
Are our doomsmen. Man's life was made
Not for men's creeds,
But men's actions.
--Owen Meredith

Gracious Father, may the world speak to me of thy love, and of thy gifts of peace and power, which it freely offers. May I not pass by its great values, and prefer to purchase at a great cost my indolence and dissipation. Amen.

Know[3.2-34], Matt[022], Thom[049]

08 March (Day 67 / 298)

O boundless self-contentment voiced
In flying air-born bubbles!
O joy that mocks our sad unrest,
And frowns our earth-born troubles!
The life that floods the happy fields
With song and light and color,
Will shape our lives to richer states
And heap our measures fuller.
--C.P. Cranch

Is life not a hundred times too short for us to stifle ourselves? --Nietzsche

One may secure and preserve that repose in the turbulence of a great city--as Shakespeare surely found and preserved it in the London of the sixteenth century. For repose does not depend on external conditions; it depends on sound adjustment to tasks, opportunities, pleasures, and the general order of life.
--Hamilton Mabie

Gracious Father, help me to understand that peace cannot abide in misery, nor can it stay with every mood. May I be able to overcome the depression that may keep me in sadness and isolation, and have delight in the gladness of friends, and live in the peace of strong resolutions. Amen.

Know[3.2-35], Ench[023], Thom[050]

09 March (Day 68 / 297)

Yet nerve thy spirit to the Proof, and blanch not at thy chosen lot;
The timid good may stand aloof, the sage may frown--yet faint thou not;
Nor heed the shaft too surely cast, the foul and hissing bolt of scorn;
For with thy Side shall dwell, at last, the victory of endurance born.
--William C. Bryant

You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself into one. --James Anthony Froude

Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? --Ezekiel 22.14

Loving Father, search me, and if there be any evil ways in me, correct them, and lead me into the ways everlasting. I pray that I may not be deformed from selfishness, but with a lowly and expectant heart run with patience and triumph the race that is set before me. Amen.

Know[3.2-36], Prov[023], Thom[051]

10 March (Day 69 / 296)

So he died by his faith. That is fine--
More than the most of us do.
But stay. Can you add to that line
That he lived for it too?
It is easy to die. Men have died
For a wish or a whim--
From bravado or passion or pride.
Was it hard for him?
But to live: every day to live out
All the truth that he dreamt,
While his friends met his conduct with doubt,
And the world with contempt.
Was it thus that he plodded ahead,
Never turning aside?
Then we'll talk of the life that he led.
Never mind how he died.
--Ernest Crosby

For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah: wherefore turn yourselves, and live. --Ezekiel 18.32

When you connect to the silence within you, that is when you can make sense of the disturbance going on around you. --Stephen Richards

Almighty God, help me to live an upright life. Give me courage to abandon useless customs, and seeming duties that keep me from perfecting my life. Amen.

Know[3.2-37], ZenT[018], Matt[023]

11 March (Day 70 / 295)

There is nothing that is puerile in nature; and he who becomes impassioned of a flower, a blade of grass, a butterfly's wing, a nest, a shell, wraps around a small thing that always contains a great truth. To succeed in modifying the appearance of a flower is insignificant in itself, if you will; but reflect upon it for however short a while and it becomes gigantic. --Maurice Maeterlinck

O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty:
What further may be sought for or declared?
--Robert Browning

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. --Matthew 6.28, 29

Creator of all, I do know that if I may hold myself close enough, I can hear restful music through the breeze, and find secrets in the flowers and leaves. I rejoice that thou hast made the woods and rivers that thou dost love, so I too might possess them, and not be a tenant of them only. May I look and study deeper the things which bring me closer to thee. Amen.

Know[3.2-38], Ench[024], Thom[052]

12 March (Day 71 / 294)

Among the happiest and proudest possessions of a man is his character. It is a wreath, it is a bank in itself. What is the essence and life of character? Principle, integrity, independence. --Bulwer Lytton

No great genius was ever without some mixture of madness, nor can anything grand or superior to the voice of common mortals be spoken except by the agitated soul. --Aristotle

Let others lead small lives, but not you. Let others argue over small things, but not you. Let others cry over small hurts, but not you. Let others leave their future in someone else’s hands, but not you. --Jim Rohn

Life is not discovery of fate; it is continuous creation of future, through choices of thoughts, feelings and actions in the present. --Sanjay Sahay

Since thou hast been precious in my sight, and honorable, and I have loved thee; therefore will I give men in thy stead, and peoples instead of thy life.
--Isaiah 43.4

Lord God, forbid that I should try to supplant character with manners and worldly goods. May I remember that thou seest me, and knowest me, and I need no shield from thee. Help me that I may be found acceptable while thou dost search me to the depths of the soul. Amen.

Know[3.2-39], Prov[024], Thom[053]

13 March (Day 72 / 293)

If stores of dry and learned lore we gain
We keep them in the memory of the brain;
Names, things, and facts--whate'er we knowledge call,
There is the common ledger for them all;
And images on this cold surface traced
Make slight impressions and are soon effaced.
But we've a page more glowing and more bright
On which our friendship and our love to write;
That these may never from the soul depart,
We trust them to the memory of the heart.
There is no dimming--no effacement here;
Each pulsation keeps the record clear;
Warm golden letters all the tablet fill,
Nor lose their luster till the heart stands still.
--Daniel Webster

I often wonder why it is that we are not all kinder than we are. How much the world needs it! How easily it is done! How instantaneously it acts! How infallibly it is remembered! --Henry Drummond

Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days.
--Ecclesiastes 11.1

My Father, thou hast taught me through the gifts of life, that there is no labor or price too dear to pay for love. I pray to love thee more that I may have more love to bestow on others. Amen.

Know[3.2-40], Matt[024], Thom[054]

14 March (Day 73 / 292)

Rivers to the ocean run,
Nor stay in all their course;
Fire ascending seeks the sun;
Both speed them to their source;
So a soul that's born of God,
Pants to view his glorious face,
Upward tends to his abode,
To rest in his embrace.
--Robert Seagrave

As the bird trims her to the gale
I trim myself to the storm of time;
I man the rudder, reef the sail,
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime;
Lowly faithful, banish fear,
The port well worth the cruise is near
And every wave is charmed.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. --Psalm 42.1

My Father, I pray that if I meet with difficulty, I may not go backward, nor stand still, and fear to go forward. Unfold to me the depth and breadth of the ideal and beautiful, that I may not be content to succeed in the shallowness of life: but may I aspire to the height of the soul, even if I fail to acquire great things. Amen.

Know[3.2-41], ZenT[019], Ench[025]

15 March (Day 74 / 291)

I will take the responsibility! --Andrew Jackson

What ought to be possible for everyone is to arrive at a sort of harmony of life, to have definite things that they want to do.... The people whom it is hard to fit into any scheme of benevolent creation are the vague, insignificant, drifting people, whose only rooted tendency is to do whatever is suggested to them.
--Arthur C. Benson

Heard are the voices,
Heard are the sages,
The worlds, and the ages;
Choose well! your choice is
Brief and endless.
--Goethe

Only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the law.
--Joshua 1.7

Gracious Father, I pray that thou wilt free me from evil thoughts before they become a habit. Create in me that freedom which makes me not ashamed to acknowledge the wrong, and which will enable me to stand for the right. Quicken my thoughts, that they may keep my heart inspired. Amen.

Know[3.2-42], Prov[025], Thom[055]

16 March (Day 75 / 290)

If we live truly we shall see truly. It is as easy for the strong man to be strong as it is for the weak to be weak. When we have new perception we shall gladly disburthen the memory of the hoarded treasures as old rubbish. When a man lives with God his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

The tissue of the life to be,
We weave with colors all our own,
And in the field of Destiny
We reap as we have sown.
--Raphael

Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. --Acts 4.13

Lord God, quiet me if I am not calm, that my soul may be able to contemplate and have an opportunity to grow. Help me, that I may be able even in discouragements to have the true perception of life. Amen.

Know[3.2-43], Matt[025], Thom[056]

17 March (Day 76 / 289)

What is really wanted is to light up the spirit that is within a child. In some sense and in some effectual degree there is in every child the material of good work in the world; and in every child, not only in those who are brilliant, not only in those who are quick, but in those who are stolid, and even in those who are dull.
--William Gladstone

If you make children happy now, you will make them happy twenty years hence by the memory of it. --Kate Douglas Wiggin

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. --Deuteronomy 6. 6, 7

Lord God, may I be diligent for the progress of little children. Show me how I may minister unto them; and grant that I may be able to see the necessity of giving, more than I do the pleasure of receiving. Amen.

Know[3.2-44], Ench[026], Thom[057]

18 March (Day 77 / 288)

My minde to me a kingdom is:
Such perfect joy therein I finde
As far exceeds all earthly blisse
That God or nature hath assignede.
--William Byrd

Teach your proud will to make those nobler choices
Which bring to soul and heart enduring health.
Deafen your ears to those contending voices,
Look in your heart, learn your own being's wealth.
Its resources vast, its undiscovered treasure
Waiting for these same idle hands to mine.
Learn that the grandest of Nature's creations
May not be bounded by man's limitations.
--Rose E. Cleveland

But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. --Job 23.13

Almighty God, grant that I may never succumb to the controlling influences of the body, and lose the power of my mind. May I guard the dictates of my heart and keep my mind in command to obey thy will. Amen.

Know[3.2-45], Prov[026], Thom[058]

19 March (Day 78 / 287)

Isn't it interesting to get blamed for everything? But I must be thankful in feeling that I would rather perish than blame another for my misdeeds and deficiencies.
--David Livingstone

Criticism is helpful. If a man makes a mistake, criticism enables him to correct it; if he is unjustly criticized, the criticism helps him. I have had my share of criticism since I have been in public life, but it has not prevented me from doing what I thought proper to do. --William Jennings Bryan

For himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.
--Hebrews 13.5, 6

Loving Father, I thank thee that thou art the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; and I am glad I cannot receive from thee the slights and wounds that I may give or receive from my friends. May I be considerate and more forgiving, and by my sincerity be worthy of the purpose which I pursue. Amen.

Know[3.2-46], Matt[026], Thom[059]

20 March (Day 79 / 286)

Whoever is not with me in the essential things of life, him I no longer know--I owe him no consideration. --Henrik Ibsen

Only he who lives in truth finds it. The deepest truth is not born of conscious striving, but comes in the quiet hour when a noble nature gives itself into the keeping of life, to suffer, to feel, to think, and to act as it is moved by a wisdom not its own. --Hamilton Mabie

Lord God, I thank thee for the silent ways of revelation which bring hopeful communion with thee. Help me to be composed, that my life may not create a noise and my soul miss the messages that come from the depths of truth and love. Amen.

Know[3.2-47], ZenT[020], Ench[027]

21 March (Day 80 / 285)

Go through life with soft influences breathing around thee. Keep thy heart high above the many-colored mist of earth and above its storm clouds.
--Jean Paul Richter

Recollection is the only paradise from which we cannot be turned out.
--Jean Paul Richter

Come, Disappointment, come!
Thou art not stern to me;
Sad monitress! I own thy sway,
A votary sad in every day,
I bend my knee to thee,
From sun to sun
My race will run;
I only bow, and say, My God, thy will be done!
--Henry Kirke White

If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad countenance, and be of good cheer. --Job 9.27

Gracious Father, help me to respond cheerfully when called upon to give. May I never repent of tenderness which others fail to appreciate, but may I be glad of all that I give and for all I receive. Amen.

Know[3.3-01], Prov[027], Thom[060]

22 March (Day 81 / 284)

Red Love still rules the day, white Faith enfolds the night,
And hope, green-mantled, leads the way by the walls of the City of Light.
Therefore I walk as one who sees the joy shine through
Of the other Life behind our life, like the stars behind the blue.
--Dean Farrar

There can be no greater delight than is experienced by a man who, by his own unaided resources, frees himself from the consequences of error: Heaven looks down with satisfaction upon such a spectacle. --Goethe

Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a land that reacheth afar. --Isaiah 33.17

Lord God, help me to remember that I may not only be forgiven for my transgression, but with thy help I may be led away from the wrong. May I be content to follow where thou dost lead. Amen.

Know[3.3-02], Matt[027], Thom[061]

23 March (Day 82 / 283)

Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together; that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the daylight of life.... do thou thyself but hold thy tongue for one day; on the morrow how much clearer are thy purposes and duties! --Thomas Carlyle

Deliberate much before you say and do anything; for it will not be in your power to recall what is said or done. --Epictetus

Set a watch, O Jehovah, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.
--Psalm 141.3

My Lord, make me a lover of the truth. Make me careful of my thoughts, and the words I would speak, that I may not think selfishly and speak cruelly, but keep myself holy unto thee. Amen.

Know[3.3-03], Ench[028], Thom[062]

24 March (Day 83 / 282)

Every quivering tongue of flame
Seems to murmur some great name,
Seems to say to me "Aspire!'
No endeavor is in vain;
Its reward is in the doing,
And the rapture of pursuing
Is the prize of vanquished gain.
--Henry W. Longfellow

Never be sad or desponding
If thou hast faith to believe;
Grace for the duties before thee
Ask of thy God and receive
--Fanny Crosby.

I spread forth my hands unto thee: My soul thirsteth after thee, as a weary land.
--Psalm 143.6

Almighty God, make me conscious of my weaknesses, and make me ashamed of my indulgences. Give me a victory over self; and may I consider more what I put in my life. Make me eager to be inspired me for greater aspirations. Amen.

Know[3.3-04], Prov[028], Thom[063]

25 March (Day 84 / 281)

How awful is the thought of the wonders underground,
Of the mystic changes wrought in the silent, dark profound!
How each thing upward tends by necessity decreed,
And the world's support depends on the shooting of a seed!
The summer's in her ark, and this sunny-pinioned day
Is commissioned to remark whether Winter holds her sway:
Go back, thou dove of peace, with myrtle on thy wing,
Say that floods and tempests cease, and the world is ripe for Spring.
--Horace Smith

I should never have made my success in life if I had not bestowed upon the least thing I have ever undertaken the same attention and care that I have bestowed upon the greatest. --Charles Dickens

Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost.
--John 6.12

How do we keep our inner fire alive? Two things, at minimum, are needed: an ability to appreciate the positives in our life, and a commitment to action.
--Nathaniel Branden

Loving Father, cause me to learn from nature that to have perfection I must be attentive at the beginning of growth. Help me to select with care the soil wherein I plant; and to weed and cultivate my life that it may grow to beauty and usefulness. Amen.

Know[3.3-05], ZenT[021], Matt[028]

26 March (Day 85 / 280)

Every man takes care that his neighbor shall not cheat him, but a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well. He has changed his market-cart into a chariot of the sun.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

He that is unacquainted with the nature of the world must be at a loss to know where he is. And he that cannot tell the ends he was made for is ignorant both of himself and the world too. --Marcus Aurelius

Let him who would enjoy a good future waste none of his present.
--Roger Babson

Almighty God, may I not only approve of justice and kindness, but practice it. Grant that I may be attentive to the call of work and steadfast in completing it. May I be sincere to those who are dear to me, and never falter in my support to those who are dependent upon me. Amen.

Know[3.3-06], Ench[029], Thom[064]

27 March (Day 86 / 279)

It takes great strength to bring your life up square
With your accepted thought and hold it there:
Resisting the inertia that drags it back
From new attempts, to the old habit's track.
It is so easy to drift back, to sink.
So hard to live abreast of what you think.
--Charlotte Perkins Stetson

If a person had delivered up your body to anyone whom he met in his way, you would certainly be angry. And do you feel no shame in delivering up your own mind to be disconcerted and confounded by anyone who happens to give you ill language. --Epictetus

My Father, my soul sinks with shame when I think of the great moments that I have given over to mean little things. Help me that I may reckon more on the value of time, and live not to tolerate life, but to have a great need for it, that day by day I may have a deeper consciousness of its appropriate use. Amen.

Know[3.3-07], Prov[029], Thom[065]

28 March (Day 87 / 278)

They may not need me,
Yet they might;
I'll let my heart be
Just in sight--
A smile so small
As mine might be
Precisely their
Necessity.
--Unknown

You hear that boy laughing?--you think he's all fun;
But the angels laugh too at the good he has done;
the children laugh loud as they troop to his call,
And the poor man that knows him laughs loudest of all.
--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Lord God, I pray that I may be fair, and not pass judgment on those whom I like or those whom I dislike, and so bring unhappy regrets. May I remember that, though hasty judgment often may be temporary, the gain or loss of a friend may be permanent. Amen.

Know[3.3-08], Matt[029], Thom[066]

29 March (Day 88 / 277)

The year's at the spring
And the day's at the morn;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing:
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven:
All's well with the world.
--Robert Browning

Dear Lord and Father of mankinds
Forgive our feverish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence praise.
--John G. Whittier

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength. --Isaiah 30. 15

Lord God, I beseech thee to give me the strength which endures. Grant that I may have the ceaseless content which is secured by choosing and continuing in the right way. From the wealth of each day renew my hope, and quiet my soul with the calm of thy peace. Amen.

Know[3.3-09], Ench[030], Thom[067]

30 March (Day 89 / 276)

Let us not run the world hastily,
Let us not grasp at the rope of wealth impatiently;
What should be treated with mature judgment,
Let us not treat in a fit of temper;
Whenever we arrive at a cool place,
Let us rest sufficiently well;
Let us give prolonged attention to the future,
And then let us give due regard to the consequence of things,
And that is on account of our sleeping.
--A prayer of the Yorubas
Wayne Lee Jones, "Weave a Garment of Brightness"

Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Jehovah your God. --Jeremiah 26. 13

What has he found who has lost God? And what has he lost who has found God? --Ibn Allah Al-Iskandari

Eternal God, teach me the way of a complete and unbroken trust. In my disappointments, and in my devotions, may my faith and hope be as immortal as my soul. May I listen for thy voice and answer thy call. Amen.

Know[3.3-10], ZenT[022], Prov[030]

31 March (Day 90 / 275)

Rough and steep is the path indicated by divine suggestion; mossy and declining the green way along which temptation strews flowers. Then conscience whispers, "Do what you feel is right, obey me, and I will plant for you firm footing."
--Charlotte Brontë

God help us do our duty, and not shrink, And trust in heaven humbly for the rest. --Owen Meredith

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life.
--Deuteronomy 30.19

To serve is beautiful, but only if it is done with joy and a whole heart.
--Pearl S. Buck

My Father, as I review my life I am impressed how accurately my deeds have copied my thoughts. And though I have failed thee so often, yet I pray that thou wilt accept my yearnings, to think and work for the best in every day. Amen.

Know[3.3-11], Matt[030], Thom[068]

Take this opportunity to review your experiences. Applaud your achievements, learn from life's twists, and appreciate your Hero's Journey. Welcome the new month with open arms, weaving your desires into a tapestry of fresh goals and exciting adventures.

01 April (Day 91 / 274)

It is a peculiar quality of a fool to perceive the faults of others, and to forget his own. --Cicero

A man may be as much a fool from the want of sensibility as the want of sense. --Mrs. Jameson

He that knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool: shun him. --Arabian Maxim

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him. --Proverbs 26.12

Almighty God, grant that I may be spared the allurements of deceptive happiness which leaves weary days. I ask for wisdom that I may not speak foolishly, think foolishly, or act foolishly; and may I not be detained by the foolishness of others, but pursue my work, whether it be far or near. Amen.

Review Step 4 this month; Ench[031], Thom[069]

02 April (Day 92 / 273)

Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And e'en his failings leaned to Virtue's side;
But in his duty prompt at every call,
He watched and wept, he prayed and felt, for all.
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.
--Oliver Goldsmith

I am no longer good through deliberate intent, but by long habit have reached a point where I am not only able to do right, but am unable to do anything but what is right. --Senceca

You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end, each of us must work for his own improvement and, at the same time, share a general responsibility for all humanity, our particular duty being to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful. --Marie Curie

Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. --Matthew 22.21

We all live under the same sky, but we don’t all have the same horizon. --Konrad Adenauer

My Lord, I thank thee for the wisdom and love that is spoken through the lives of strong men and women. Grant that I may be willing to learn of them, and gladly serve where I am needed, remembering that thou art Lord of all. Amen.

Know[3.3-12], Prov[031], Thom[070]

03 April (Day 93 / 272)

Sum up at night what thou hast done by day
And in the morning what thou hast to do:
Dress and undress thy soul: mark the decay
And growth of it; if with thy watch that too
Be dowl, then wind up both; since we shall be
Most surely judged, make thy accounts agree.
--George Herbert

To look up and not down,
To look forward and not back,
To look out and not in, and
To lend a hand.
--Edward E. Hale

There is a healthy hardiness about real dignity that never dreads contact and communion with others, however humble. --Washington Irving

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: My justice was as a robe and a diadem. --Job 29.14

My Lord, I pray that I may always be found clothed in love and kindness. Make me worthy to minister to those who may be dependent on me, and whether they be rich or poor, high or low, may I try to help them. Amen.

Know[3.3-13], Matt[031], Thom[071]

04 April (Day 94 / 271)

"The greatest object in the universe," said a certain philosopher, "is a good man struggling with adversity"; yet there is still a greater, which is the good man who comes to relieve it. --Oliver Goldsmith

Yet I believe that somewhere, soon or late,
A peace will fall upon the angry reaches of my mind;
A peace initiate in some heroic hour when I behold
A friend's long-quested triumph, or unbind
The tressed gold from a child's laughing face.
I still believe-- so much believe.
--J. Drinkwater

But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? --1 John 3.17

Almighty God, grant that I may feel the needs of thy children in all lands; and may I be willing to give of thy blessings, as I am ready to receive them. May my tribute be not only of tender thoughts and kind words, but may I give of myself, and of what I have, as thou hast through love and wisdom done for me. Amen.

Know[3.3-14], Ench[032], Thom[072]

05 April (Day 95 / 270)

As morning hears before it run
The music of the mounting sun,
And laughs to watch his trophies won
From darkness, and her hosts undone,
And all the night becomes a breath,
Nor dreams that fear should hear and flee
The summer menace of the sea,
So hear our hope what life may be,
And know it not for death.
--Algernon Charles Swinburne

I came from God, and I'm going back to God, and I won't have any gaps of death in the middle of my life. --George MacDonald

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; But the expectation of the wicked shall perish. --Proverbs 10.28

Lord God, teach me the way and show me the light of the eternal day; and may the vision fill my soul as I take courage and follow it. May I but remember that before the creation of life thou didst have a purpose in death. Amen.

Know[3.3-15], ZenT[023], Prov[032]

06 April (Day 96 / 269)

Even if the sacrifices which are made to duty and virtue are painful to make, they are well repaid by the sweet recollections which they leave at the bottom of the heart. --Jean B. Rousseau

I am the man of a thousand loves,
A thousand loves have I;
And all my loves are white-winged doves,
That into my soul would fly.
I am the man of a thousand friends
Of tuneful memory;
And each of them spends the delicate ends
Of a brilliant day with me.
And all my gifts are magical words
That sing sweet songs to me;
And the sensitive words are caroling birds
In the garden of imagery.
--Edwin Leibfreed

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.
--Revelation 2.10

Loving Father, may I enter into a broader conception of sharing thy gifts. May I not seek thy blessings to keep, but to use for renewed inspiration. Amen.

Know[3.3-16], Matt[032], Thom[073]

07 April (Day 97 / 268)

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The child is Father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.
--William Wordsworth

A self-controlled mind is a free mind, and freedom is power. I call that mind free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers. I call that mind free which resists the bondage of habit, which does not live on its old virtues, but forgets what is behind, and rejoices to pour itself forth in fresh and higher exertions. --William Ellery Channing

Lord God, give me the power to control my mind and heart, that I may not be a slave to habits that may keep me from eternal love and blessedness. May I have sympathy and compassion for others, and cherish thy tenderness and mercy as I hold it in my daily life. Amen.

Know[3.3-17], Ench[033], Thom[074]

08 April (Day 98 / 267)

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life from aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.
--Emily Dickinson

The most solid comfort one can fall back upon is the thought that the business of one's life is to help in some small way to reduce the sum of ignorance, degradation, and misery on the face of this beautiful earth.
--George Eliot

You must be the change you wish to see in the world. --Mahatma Ghandi

I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be honorable, to be compassionate. It is, after all, to matter: to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all. --Leo C. Rosten

My Father, take away the spirit, if I may be inclined to keep the best, and to be always seeking my portion. May I have the desire to share with those who have less, whether it be of bread or love. Amen.

Know[3.3-18], Prov[033], Thom[075]

09 April (Day 99 / 266)

Gather a shell from the strown beach
And listen at its lips; they sigh
The same desire and mystery,
The echo of the whole sea's speech.
And all mankind is this at heart--
Not anything but what thou art:
And Earth, Sea, Man are all in each.
--Dante Gabriel Rossetti

And as, in sparkling majesty, a star
Gilds the bright summit of some glory cloud;
Brightening the half-veil'd face of heaven afar;
So when dark thoughts my boding spirit shroud,
Sweet Hope! celestial influence round me shed,
Waving the silver pinions o'er my head.
--John Keats

Almighty God, may I ever know the generous glow that comes with an overwhelming desire to cultivate the soul. With hope may I find the way through the darkness that leads to immortality, even if I may have to experience the weariness that may accompany it. Amen.

Know[3.3-19], Matt[033], Thom[076]

10 April (Day 100 / 265)

The essence of happy living is never to find life dull, never to feel the ugly weariness which comes of overstrain; to be fresh, cheerful, leisurely, sociable, unhurried, well-balanced. It seems to me impossible to be these things unless we have time to consider life a little, to deliberate, to select, to abstain.
--Arthur C. Benson

Four things come not back--the spoken word, the sped arrow, the past life, the neglected opportunity. --William Hazlitt

Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure. --2 Peter 1.10

My Father, may I not miss my work through indifference and feel it is thy neglect. May I be reminded that the enrichment of life comes through persistency and being consistent, and may not be found on the idle paths of extravagant ways. Help me to take up my work with a willing spirit and give my best to it. Amen.

Know[3.3-20], ZenT[024], Ench[034]

11 April (Day 101 / 264)

The safe path to excellence and success in every calling, is that of appropriate preliminary education, diligent application to learn the art of assiduity and practicing it. --Edward Everett

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.
Behold, we know not anything:
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last--far off--at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.
--Alfred Tennyson

And we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope even to the end: that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
--Hebrews 6.11, 12

Lord God, help me in all my circumstances, and be with me in my daily work. Help me in my efforts, as I endeavor to attain, and may my will be hidden in yours. Show me the path you wish for me to tread. Amen.

Know[3.3-21], Prov[034], Thom[077]

12 April (Day 102 / 263)

I would rather be right than be President. --Henry Clay.

Who does the best his circumstances allow
Does well, acts nobly; angels could no more.
--Edward Young

Pedigree has no more to do in making a man actually greater than he is than a peacock's feather in his hat has in making him actually taller. When the world stands in need of an aristocrat, nature pitches one into it, and furnishes him papers without any flaw in them. --Josh Billings

Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. --Hebrews 10.35, 36

Lord God, help me to select with care the plans and foundation of my life. May I use the best material; and may it be worthy of a permanent home. Amen.

Know[3.3-22], Matt[034], Thom[078]

13 April (Day 103 / 262)

I pray you, bear me hence from forth the noise and rumor of the field where I may think the remnant of my thoughts in peace, and part this body and my soul with contemplation and devout desires. --William Shakespeare

All of life is a near-death experience. --Alan Harris

Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile. --Mark 6.31

If there were dreams to sell,
Merry and sad to tell,
And the crier rang the bell,
What would you buy?
A cottage lone and still
With bowers nigh,
Shadowy, my woes to still,
Until I die.
Such pearl from Life's fresh crown
Fain would I shake me down,
Were dreams to have at will
This would best heal my ill,
This would I buy.
--Thomas Lovell Beddoes

Lord God, help me to bear in mind that to step aside and safeguard the mind in contemplation is a safeguard to the soul. Amen.

Know[3.3-23], Ench[035], Thom[079]

14 April (Day 104 / 261)

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies--
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower--but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.
--Alfred Tennyson

So much is history stranger than fiction, and so true it is Nature has caprices which Art dares not imitate. --Thomas Macaulay

Nature is the face of God. He appears to us through it, and we can read his thoughts in it. --Victor Hugo

Many, O Jehovah my God, are the wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward. --Psalm 40.5

Eternal God, I thank thee for the seasons which bring abundance and beauty. I thank thee for thy loving care, which is over all and forever. May I behold thy works and make thee a very present help for all my needs. Amen.

Know[3.3-24], Prov[035], Thom[080]

15 April (Day 105 / 260)

Two thirds of human existence are wasted in hesitation, and the last third in repentance. --Emile Souvestre

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity. --Henry Van Dyke

Always do your best. Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret. --Don Miguel Ruiz

The barriers are not erected which shall say to aspiring talent, "Thus far and no further." --Beethoven

Be strong and of good courage. --Joshua 1.6

Almighty God, I pray that I may always be alive to my opportunities, but may I never leave others impoverished by taking advantage of them. May my prosperity be conducted with my eyes open, guarding what I give and receive, that my possessions may remain valuable through life. Amen.

Know[3.3-25], ZenT[025], Matt[035]

16 April (Day 106 / 259)

Weary of myself and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At the vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forward, forward, o'er the starlit sea
O air-born voice! long since severely clear,
A cry like thine in my own heart I hear.
Resolve to be thyself: and know that he
Who finds himself, loses his misery.
--Matthew Arnold

This above all to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou can'st not then be false to any man.
--William Shakespeare

Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the path of thy feet, And let all thy ways be established.
--Proverbs 4.25, 26

My Father, give me a sense of nearness to thee when I may be faltering from weariness in well doing. May I hold to my determinations. Help me to know what is useless, that I may not give unnecessary energy, and to know what is worth while, that I may acquire strength through the power of truth. Amen.

Know[3.3-26], Ench[036], Thom[081]

17 April (Day 107 / 258)

Shall I ask the brave soldier who fights at my side,
In the cause of mankind, if our creeds agree?
Shall I give up the friend I have valued and tried,
If he kneel not before the same altar as me?
--Thomas Moore

I met a little Elf-man once,
Down where the lilies blow.
I asked him why he was so small
And why he didn't grow.
He slightly frowned, and with his eye
He looked me through and through.
"I'm quite as big for me," said he
"As you are big for you."
--John Kendrick Bangs

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!
--Isaiah 5.21

Loving Father, grant that I may not barter love with formalities, nor sacrifice love for customs. But, may I have a fellowship that is true and sincere, and that may be counted on, through all and for all. Amen.

Know[3.3-27], Prov[036], Thom[082]

18 April (Day 108 / 257)

Nor can I count him happiest who has never
Been forced with his own hand his chains to sever,
And for himself find out the way divine;
He never knew the aspirer's glorious pains,
He never earned the struggler's priceless gains.
--James Russell Lowell

There is not time for hate, O wasteful friend.
Put hate away until the ages end.
Have you an ancient wound? Forget the wrong--
Out in my West a forest loud with song
Towers high and green over a field of snow,
Over a glacier buried far below.
--Edwin Markham

Lord God, help me to realize the power of my life. May I have delight in the struggles I have made for the ways of righteousness. Make me careful to avoid the things that debase life. May I aspire for the highest and best. Amen.

Know[3.4-01], Matt[036], Thom[083]

19 April (Day 109 / 256)

The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his opportunity when it comes. --Disraeli

One sees, and the other does not see; one enjoys an unspeakable pleasure, and the other loses that pleasure which is as free to him as the air.... His eyes alone will give him a life worth living. --Charles W. Eliot

Having eyes, see ye not? --Mark 8.18

My Father, help me to realize that I cannot feel the joy that breathes through the early morning unless I am with it. May I see distinctly the glory of to-day. Help me to be watchful that I may receive thy revelations. Amen.

Know[3.4-02], Ench[037], Thom[084]

20 April (Day 110 / 255)

Do not act as if you had ten thousand years to throw away. Death stands at your elbow. Be good for something while you live and it is in your power.
--Marcus Aurelius

And O, my heart, my heart,
Be careful to go strewing in and out
The way with good deeds, lest it come about
That when thou shalt depart,
No low lamenting tongue be found to say,
The world is poorer since thou went'st away
--Alice Cary

A good man prolongs his life; to be able to enjoy one's past life is to live twice.
--Martial

The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. --Psalm 112.6

Heavenly Father, thou hast made my life dear; forgive me if I have made dearer the things that I have put around it. Many days have been used for costly things that have faded and are laid aside. May I realize the meaning of days that have been lost. Make me more concerned for what I put in the days to come. Amen.

Know[3.4-03], ZenT[026], Prov[037]

21 April (Day 111 / 254)

Education should lead and guide man to clearness concerning himself and in himself, to peace with nature, and to unity with God. --Friedrich Fröbel

When spring unlocks the flowers, to paint the laughing soil;
When summer's balmy showers refresh the mower's toil;
When winter binds in frosty chains the fallow and the flood,
In God the earth rejoiceth still, and owns its maker good.
--Reginald Heber

A memory without a blot or contamination must be an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment. --Charlotte Brontë

Lord of light, thou art the light of my life. May I make thee the joy and light of my soul. Call me to where it is clear and high, that I may see above the mist. May I not weary in climbing to reach thee in the high places. Amen.

Know[3.4-04], Matt[037], Thom[085]

22 April (Day 112 / 253)

We live in deeds, not years: in thoughts, not breaths: in feelings, not in figures on a dial. We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best. --Philip James Bailey

Men cease to interest us when we find their limitations. The only sin is limitation. As soon as you once come up with a man's limitations it is all over with him. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgeteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing. --James 1.25

The world which we now inhabit is a world of trials and temptations, and if we suffer our passions to take possession of us, it is no easy matter to break their force. If we once give a loose to our appetites we know not when to hold the reign; nor is it in our power always to stop short of vice; so frail is human nature, so strong the force of habit, that it is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it. --Amos Wilson, the Pennsylvania Hermit

Lord God, help me to break away from habits that fasten me in the ruts of life. Draw me out to thy broad way, where there are no limits to thy wonderful works, that I may expand my life. Amen.

Know[3.4-05], Ench[038], Thom[086]

23 April (Day 113 / 252)

My crown is in my heart, not on my head:
Not decked with diamonds and Indian Stones,
Nor to be seen. My crown is called content.
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.
--William Shakespeare

At the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky
And flinging the clouds and the towers by
Is a place of central calm:
So here in the roar of mortal things,
I have a place where my spirit sings,
In the hollow of God's Palm.
--Edwin Markham

Rest in Jehovah, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way. --Psalm 37.7

Temptation, like contentment in sin, is not a lasting condition, as the majority of people suppose; it is a passing phase, an experience through which the soul must pass; but as to whether a man will pass through that condition in this present life, and realise holiness and heavenly rest here and now, will depend entirely upon the strength of his intellectual and spiritual exertions, and upon the intensity and ardour with which he searches for Truth. --James Allen

Almighty God, my heart beats quicker and the desire for thy care grows stronger when I remember thy promises are given for all eternity. May I be grateful and contented with thy love and care. Amen.

Know[3.4-06], Prov[038], Thom[087]

24 April (Day 114 / 251)

By religion I mean the power, whatever it be, which makes a man choose what is hard rather than what is easy; what is lofty and noble rather than what is mean and selfish; that puts courage into timorous hearts and gladness into clouded spirits. --Arthur C. Benson

For all noble things the time is long and the way rude.... For every start and struggle of impatience there shall be so much attendant failure.... But the fire which Patience carries in her own hand is that truly stolen from heaven--unquenchable incense of life. --John Ruskin

But they that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint. --Isaiah 40.31

My Father, I pray that I may not be indifferent to the call of my soul. May I not seek to serve the disappearing and neglect to make life worthy. Acquaint me with the permanent values of life. Make clear the way of strength, that I may not be misled by ease and carried to weakness. May my life be ennobled by the power of my possessions. Amen.

Know[3.4-07], Matt[038], Thom[088]

25 April (Day 115 / 250)

Truly God follows us with encouragements: let him not lose his blessing upon us! They come in season, and with all the advantages of heartening… There is nothing to be feared but our own sin and sloth. --Oliver Cromwell

Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if thou be near;
O may no earthborn cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servants' eyes.
--John Keble

For Jehovah God is a sun and a shield: Jehovah will give grace and glory; No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. --Psalm 84.11

Truly loving another means letting go of all expectations. It means full acceptance, even celebration of another's personhood. --Karen Casey

My Father, may I not err in choosing thy benefits, nor fail from the neglect to use them. Make me appreciative of all thy gifts, and, through thy wisdom and power, may I find the best use for them. Amen.

Know[3.4-08], ZenT[027], Ench[039]

26 April (Day 116 / 249)

How strange a chequer-work of Providence is the life of man! and by what secret different springs are the affections hurried about, as different circumstances present! Today we love what tomorrow we hate; today we seek what tomorrow we shun; to-day we desire what to-morrow we fear; nay, even tremble at the apprehension of. --Daniel Defoe

Lord, forbid that I should fear to change for the better or be so pleased with myself that I feel no need for a higher life. Make me dissatisfied if I am not trying to grow in truth and to live in noble deeds. Amen.

Know[3.4-09], Prov[039], Thom[089]

27 April (Day 117 / 248)

People who are dishonest, or rash, or stupid will inevitably suffer the penalties of dishonesty, or rashness, or stupidity. --Herbert Spencer

Abide in the simple and noble regions of thy life; obey thy heart.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Loving Father, help me to live a simple and noble life. Grant that I may have the blessedness that comes through peace, and escape the misery that comes from cruelty and untruth. Through my life may what I reap show that I have been careful in choosing and cultivating what I have sown. Amen.

Know[3.4-10], Matt[039], Thom[090]

28 April (Day 118 / 247)

During a long life I have proved that not one kind word ever spoken, not one kind deed ever done, but sooner or later returns to bless the giver, and becomes a chain, binding men with golden bands to the throne of God.
--Earl of Shaftesbury

There's many a time when the bitterest thing
Is said without reason, and God knows
The courage it takes to suffer the sting,
By hiding the wounds that the heart shows.
There's many a sob we bravely keep down
For the sake of old times revered so,
There's many a head with thorns for a crown
Where kisses would soon make the heart glow.
--Edwin Leibfreed

So shalt thou know wisdom to be unto thy soul; If thou hast found it, then shall there be a reward, And thy hope shall not be cut off.
--Proverbs 24.14

My Father, if I am today without happiness, may I go in search of it. Help me to remember that the will thou hast given me to overcome evil with good I may use to overcome misery with happiness. Make me careful that I may not be trapped by selfishness as I look for joy. May I delight in the sweet sensations that are felt in having consideration for others, and may I make kindness a daily habit. Amen.

Know[3.4-11], Ench[040], Thom[091]

29 April (Day 119 / 246)

Never yet was a springtime,
Late though lingered the snow,
That the sap stirred not at the whisper
Of the south wind, sweet and low;
Never yet was a springtime
When the buds forgot to blow.
Ever the wings of the summer
Are folded under the mold;
Life that has known no dying,
Is Love's, to have and to hold,
Till, sudden, the burgeoning Easter!
The song! the green and the gold!
--Margaret E. Sangster

In tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun. --Owen Meredith

All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness. --Hebrews 12.11

Almighty God, grant that as the fulfillment of the green comes to the withered grass, so thy restoring may come to me with the glory of life that comes in the resurrection of the soul. I trust thee to bring me out of winter's seal, that I may help make the spring. Amen.

Know[3.4-12], Prov[040], Thom[092]

30 April (Day 120 / 245)

We scatter seeds with careless hands,
And dream we ne'er shall see them more;
But for a thousand years
Their fruit appears
In weeds that mar the land.
--John Keble

A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellow men, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help. --George Orwell

And there came up a sweet perfume
From the unseen flowers below,
Like the savor of virtuous deeds,
Of deeds done long ago.
--Mrs. Southey

Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of pure nard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. --John 12.3

My Father, I pray that it may be mine to have the recollection of happy deeds, and not the memory of unkept promises. Help me to remember that one act is worth a thousand intentions, and that memory is the storehouse that supplies old age. Make me careful of my memory, that it may not be burdened. Amen.

Know[3.4-13], ZenT[028], Matt[040]

The month takes its final bow. Recognize your accomplishments, be grateful for what you learned, and treasure past events. And as the curtain rises on a new month, commit to fully participating in your story, shaping goals and anticipating the thrilling scenes yet to unfold.

01 May (Day 121 / 244)

If you wish to succeed in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counselor, caution your elder brother, and hope your guardian genius. --Joseph Addison

He who plants a tree, he plants love;
Tents of coolness spreading out above
Wayfarers, he may not live to see.
Gifts that grow are best;
Hands that bless are blest;
Plant-life does the rest!
Heaven and earth help him who plants a tree,
And his work his own reward shall be.
--Lucy Larcom

And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. --Psalm 1.3

Every positive change, every jump to a higher level of energy and awareness, involves a rite of passage. Each time to ascend to a higher rung on the ladder of personal evolution, we must go through a period of discomfort, of initiation. I have never found an exception. --Dan Millman

My Creator, give me joyful eyes for joyful nature. May I be alive to the gentle influences of a May day which bring new experiences to all who may receive them: and may I serve thee by unfolding to others the love of truth, the love of good, and the love of beauty. Amen.

Review Step 5 this month; Ench[041], TaoT[001]

02 May (Day 122 / 243)

Without a false humility;
For this is love's nobility,
Not to scatter bread and gold,
Goods and raiment bought and sold;
But to hold fast his simple sense,
And speak the speech of innocence,
And with hand and body and blood,
To make his bosom-counsel good.
He that feeds man serveth few;
He serves all who dares be true.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Small service is true service while it lasts:
Of humblest friends scorn not one:
The daisy, by the shadow it casts,
Protects the lingering dewdrop from the sun.
--William Wordsworth

Surely then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; Yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear. --Job 11.15

Heavenly Father, I would be thankful for the blessings I am inclined to forget. Give me a heart of gratitude, and forbid that I should hold my friends for material gain or selfish ends. May I through the truthfulness of my lips, and the honor of my acts, be a necessary friend. Amen.

Know[3.4-14], Prov[041], Thom[093]

03 May (Day 123 / 242)

The longing for ignoble things;
The strife for triumph more than truth;
The hardening of the heart that brings
Irreverence for the dreams of youth;
All these must first be trampled down
Beneath our feet, if we would gain
In the bright fields of fair renown
The right of eminent domain.
--John Keble

One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness; that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that in the long run, it is well with the good; in the long run it is ill with the wicked.
--James Anthony Froude

Gracious Father, may my heart be mindful of thee, that I may discover the truth and possess it. Steady me in my affections and save me from wandering impulses; and may I help to put wrong down and uplift humanity. Amen.

Know[3.4-15], Matt[041], Thom[094]

04 May (Day 124 / 241)

The chess board is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game we call the laws of nature. My metaphor will remind some of you of the famous picture in which Retzsch has depicted Satan playing chess with man for his soul. Substitute for the mocking fiend in that picture a calm, strong angel, who is playing "for love," as we say, and would rather lose than win, and I should accept it as an image of human life.
--Thomas Henry Huxley

In yon field o' Highland heather,
where the bonnie west wind blows,
and in its heart, dark, proud, and still,
there the black rose grows.
--Anonymous

Riches and nobility fade together. O, my God! be thou praised for having made love for all time, and immortal as thyself. --George Sand

He hath given food unto them that fear him: He will ever be mindful of his covenant. The works of his hands are truth and justice; all his precepts are sure.
--Psalm 111.5, 7

Father of life, I know I cannot hold youth. I may have prosperity or poverty. I thank thee that thou hast taught me that love may be kept changeless through all. Amen.

Know[3.4-16], Ench[042], TaoT[002]

05 May (Day 125 / 240)

As I stand by the cross, on the lone mountain's crest,
Looking over the ultimate sea,
In the gloom of the mountain a ship lies at rest,
And one sails away from the lea;
One spreads its white wings on the far-reaching track,
With pennant and sheet flowing free;
One hides in the shadow with sails laid aback--
The ship that is waiting for me.
But lo! in the distance the clouds break away,
The gate's glowing portals I see,
And I hear from the outgoing ship in the bay
The song of the sailors in glee.
So I think of the luminous footprints that bore
The comfort o'er dark Galilee,
And wait for the signal to go to the shore
To the ship that is waiting for me.
--Bret Harte

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
--Psalm 23.4

I am convinced that the jealous, the angry, the bitter and the egotistical are the first to race to the top of mountains. A confident person enjoys the journey, the people they meet along the way and sees life not as a competition. They reach the summit last because they know God isn't at the top waiting for them. He is down below helping his followers to understand that the view is glorious where ever you stand. --Shannon Alder

Eternal God, I praise thee, that "thy love is broader than the measure of man's mind," and that through all my years I may hide myself in thee, trusting thee to the end. Amen.

Know[3.4-17], Prov[042], Thom[095]

06 May (Day 126 / 239)

Hard ye may be in the tumult,
Red to your battle hilts;
Blow give blow in the foray,
Cunningly ride in the tilts.
But tenderly, unbeguiled--
Turn to a woman a woman's
Heart, and a child's to a child.
Test of the man if his worth be
In accord with the ultimate plan
That he be not, to his marring,
Always and utterly man.
That he may bring out of the tumult,
Fetter and undefiled,
To woman the heart of a woman--
To children the heart of a child.
--O. Henry

A man's concern is only whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong--acting the part of a good man or a bad. --Plato

A faithful man shall abound with blessings. --Proverbs 28.20

Almighty God, I pray that I may seek sincerely those whom I approach with sympathy, and by my honor may they feel the same sincerity for me. Amen.

Know[3.4-18], ZenT[029], Matt[042]

07 May (Day 127 / 238)

So, take and use thy work: amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand! perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!
--Robert Browning

No matter how often defeated, you are born to victory. The reward of a thing well done is to have done it. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

When I hear a young man spoken of as giving promise of high genius, the first question I ask about him is always, does he work? --John Ruskin

Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
--Matthew 5.48

O God, I pray that thou wilt search me, and in the silent moments show me myself without obstruction. Breathe upon me thy awakening breath, that I may be revived to nobler activities. Amen.

Know[3.4-19], Ench[043], TaoT[003]

08 May (Day 128 / 237)

A profound conviction raises a man above the feeling of ridicule.
--John Stuart Mill

A garden is a lonesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot--
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contends that God is not--
Not God! in the gardens! when the eve is cool?
Nay but I have a sign;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.
--Thomas E. Brown

Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee: Jehovah make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. --Numbers 6.24, 25, 26

My Father, may this be a day of usefulness. Make me sure of myself, that I may not spend my days in questioning, but accept with gratefulness thy love and tender care. Make me worthy to be called thy child. Amen.

Know[3.4-20], Prov[043], Thom[096]

09 May (Day 129 / 236)

Have love! not love alone for one,
But man as man thy brother call:
And scatter like the circling sun
Thy charities on all.
--Johann Schiller

He spoke, and words more soft than rain
Brought the Age of Gold again:
His action won such reverence sweet,
As hid all measure of the feat.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you don't behave as you believe, you will end by believing as you behave. -- Fulton J. Sheen

Gracious Lord, I pray that I may not only be known to those who are my own, but may I consider all mankind. May those who need me find me through my gentleness, and may they be assured by quiet confidence and faith. Amen.

Know[3.4-21], Matt[043], Thom[097]

10 May (Day 130 / 235)

Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs - even though checkered by failure - than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat. --Theodore Roosevelt

In speech right gentle, yet so wise: princely of mien, yet softly mannered; modest, deferent, and tender-hearted, though of a fearless blood.
--Edwin Arnold

Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.
--Matthew 5.14

Almighty God, help me to aspire, that my life may tend toward the ideal. May I be persuaded that I cannot be that which I do not possess, nor can I live in that which I do not know. Help me to put the best in what I do, that I may not feel I have failed, even though it may not seem to be a success. Amen.

Know[3.4-22], Ench[044], TaoT[004]

11 May (Day 131 / 234)

And methought that beauty and terror are only one, not two;
And the world has room for love, and death, and thunder and dew;
And all the sinews of hell slumber in the summer air;
And the face of God is a rock, but the face of the rock is fair.
Beneficent streams of tears flow at the finger of pain;
And out of the cloud that smites, beneficent rivers of rain.
--Robert Louis Stevenson

It is more shameful to be distrustful of our friends than to be deceived by them.
--La Rochefoucauld

Thou shalt rejoice in all the good which Jehovah thy God hath given unto thee.
--Deuteronomy 26.11

Lord God, may I comprehend the sacredness of friendship. I thank thee for my friends, and for all the beautiful influences which they bring to my life. May I never hold friendship without the sincerity to return it. Amen.

Know[3.4-23], Prov[044], Thom[098]

12 May (Day 132 / 233)

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
Unto thine ear I hold the dead sea-shell
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.
--Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Let me not pass my work at morn
And then at eve,
Find for what purpose I was born--
Just as I leave.
--M.B.S.

We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. --John 9.4

Lord God, I do earnestly pray that thou wilt give me strength if I may be trying to free myself from habits that mar my character. May I not lose courage and fall back in the old ways, but by faith be led where I should go. Amen.

Know[3.4-24], ZenT[030], Matt[044]

13 May (Day 133 / 232)

I heard a voice in the darkness singing
(That was a valiant soul I knew),
And the joy of his song was a wild bird winging
Swift to his mate through a sky of blue.
And his song was of love and all its bringing
And of certain day when the night was through;
I raised my eyes where the hope was springing,
And I think in his heaven God smiled too
(That was a valiant soul I knew).
--J. Stalker

The soul aids the body, and at certain moments raises it. It is the only bird which bears upward its own cage. --Victor Hugo

Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams, who looks inside awakes. --Carl Gustav Jung

Gracious Lord, I rejoice that thou dost know the depths of my soul, and that I may call upon thee to supply its needs. Make me worthy that I may not be kept from the springs of joy where my soul may be refreshed, and where I may gather hope and encouragement for the greater loves of life. Amen.

Know[3.4-25], Ench[045], TaoT[005]

14 May (Day 134 / 231)

They that wander at will where the
Works of the Lord are revealed,
Little guess what joy can be got
From a cowslip out of the field.
--Alfred Tennyson

Move onward serenely, cast aside regret, cleanse and purify life, only be undismayed and hopeful, as you turn page after page of the revelation of God.
--Arthur C. Benson

Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. --Psalm 16.11

My Father, I thank thee that nature reveals thy power as she unfolds her beauty and wonder to the searching eye. Guide me that I may see in the little flower the smile of welcome, the look of kindness, and the beauty of hope which it renders to all; and may I learn from it thy protection in the smallest things of life. Amen.

Know[3.4-26], Prov[045], Thom[099]

15 May (Day 135 / 230)

Light human nature is too lightly lost
And ruffled without cause, complaining on,
Restless with rest, until being overthrown,
It learneth to lie quiet.
--Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!
Why comes temptation but for a man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestaled in triumph? Pray
'Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!'
Yea, but, O thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight
That so he may do battle and have praise.
--Robert Browning

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. --Hebrews 2.1

Almighty God, if I am overwhelmed by the tides of temptation and discouragement, let me not drift away to sea, but anchor and take harbor in thee. May I not be afraid to trust in thy protection, but calmly wait and watch for thy deliverance. Amen.

Know[3.4-27], Matt[045], Thom[100]

16 May (Day 136 / 239)

Favored of Heaven! O Genius! are they thine,
When round thy brow the wreaths of glory shine;
While rapture gazes on thy radiant way,
'Midst the bright realms of clear mental day?
No! sacred joys! 'tis yours to dwell enshrined,
Most fondly cherished, in the purest mind.
--Felicia Hemans

Genius is intensity. --Honore Balzac

A good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving. --Lao Tzu

But what if I fail of my purpose here?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And, baffled, get up and begin again--
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.
--Robert Browning

My Lord, my life makes me conscious of weakness, and my memory brings regret; forgive me for the lost strength I neglected to develop. In thy compassion encourage me to be more watchful of my power, that I may usefully increase it, and not willfully deplete it. Amen.

Know[3.4-28], Ench[046], TaoT[006]

17 May (Day 137 / 228)

The weakest among us has a gift, however seemingly trivial, which is peculiar to him, and which worthily used, will be a gift to his race forever.
--John Ruskin

Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.
--William Wordsworth

A weak mind sinks under prosperity as well as under adversity. A strong and deep mind has two highest tides--when the moon is at full, and when there is no moon. --Julius Hare

Thou hast granted me life and loving kindness; and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. --Job 10.12

Almighty God, I pray that I may have a true appreciation of the quality of life. Reveal to me my responsibilities and help me to make them my opportunities. Keep me in search of thoughts and deeds that will increase the delight of my soul. Amen.

Know[3.4-29], Prov[046], Thom[101]

18 May (Day 138 / 227)

Longing is God's fresh heavenward will,
With our poor earthly striving;
We quench it, that we may be still
Content with merely living.
But would we learn that heart's full scope
Which we are hourly wronging,
Our lives must climb from hope to hope,
And realize our longing.
--James Russell Lowell

Friendship is for all aid and comfort through all the relations of life and death--for serene days and graceful gifts and country rambles; but also for rough roads, and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty, and persecution.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Strive to enter in by the narrow door. --Luke 13.24

Eternal God, I pray that thou wilt graciously restore my spirits if I may have settled into despondency over my disappointments. May I have the will to rise above them, and patiently strive for renewed hope. Amen.

Know[3.4-30], ZenT[031], Matt[046]

19 May (Day 139 / 226)

Tired! Well, what of that?
Didst fancy life was spent on beds of ease,
Fluttering the rose-leaves scattered by the breeze?
Come! rouse thee, work while it is called to-day!
Coward, arise--go forth upon the way!
Lonely! And what of that?
Some one must be lonely; 'tis not given to all
To feel a heart responsive rise and fall,
To blend another life into its own;
Work may be done in loneliness; work on.
Dark! Well, what of that?
Didst fondly dream the sun would never set?
Dost fear to lose thy way? Take courage yet,
Learn thou to walk by faith and not by sight,
Thy steps will be guided, and guided right.
--Unknown

If a man is to live, he must be all alive, body, soul, mind, heart, spirit.
--Thomas Merton

My Father, if thou wert far off I could not reach thee in time, for I falter so much and need thee so often. I pray that thou wilt keep so near that I can feel thy love and strength breathing within me. Amen.

Know[3.4-31], Ench[047], TaoT[007]

20 May (Day 140 / 225)

The most common ego identifications have to do with possessions, the work you do, social status and recognition, knowledge and education, physical appearance, special abilities, relationships, personal and family history, belief systems, and… other collective identifications. None of these is you. --Eckhart Tolle

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom. --James 3.13

If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.
--Lewis Carroll

Pretexts are not wanted when one wishes a thing. --Goldoni

In the place of stillness, rises potential. From the place of potential, emerges possibility. Where there is possibility, there is choice. And where there is choice, there is freedom! --Gabrielle Goddard

All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness ... the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives. --Dalai Lama

My Lord, inspire me with kind words and thoughtful deeds, that I may share the yearnings and sympathy of others. May my life show that I am dependable, and may none be left lonely today because of my forgetfulness. Amen.

Know[3.4-32], Prov[047], Thom[102]

21 May (Day 141 / 224)

Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The center moved, a circle straight succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbor, first it will embrace,
Its country next, and next, the human race.
--Alexander Pope

A gentleman is one who understands and shows every mark of deference to the claim of self-love in others, and exacts it in return from them. --William Hazlitt

But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held fast to his steps; His way have I kept, and turned not aside. --Job 23.10

Lord God, teach me how secret actions make or destroy my life. Show me the deep lines made by sorrow and discontent that cannot be effaced. May I look toward the corrections of life and not on my imperfections, that my life may be a helpful influence. Amen.

Know[3.4-33], Matt[047], Thom[103]

22 May (Day 142 / 223)

Who cares for the burden, the night, and the rain,
And the long, steep, lonesome road,
When at last through the darkness a light shines plain,
When a voice calls "Hail," and a friend draws rein,
With an arm for the stubborn load?
For life is the chance of a friend or two
This side of the journey's goal.
Though the world be a desert the long night through,
Yet the gay flowers bloom and the sky shows blue
When a soul salutes a soul.
--Unknown

In all misfortune the greatest consolation is a sympathizing friend.
--Cervantes

They help everyone his neighbor; and every one saith to his brother, be of good courage. --Isaiah 41.6

To love yourself right now, just as you are, is to give yourself heaven. Don't wait until you die. If you wait, you die now. If you love, you live now. --Alan Cohen

Loving Father, may I lay hold upon the highest standards of friendship and so be qualified to be a friend. May those who call and lean on me feel secure in my support. May none ever be ashamed to call me friend. Grant that those whom I love may keep faith with me. Amen.

Know[3.4-34], Ench[048], TaoT[008]

23 May (Day 143 / 222)

Chance cannot touch me! Time cannot hush me!
Fear, Hope, and longing, at strife;
Sink as I rise, on, on, upward forever,
Gathering strength, gaining breath--
Naught can sever
Me from the Spirit of Life.
--Margaret Fuller

But evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart.
--Thomas Hood

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.
--Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi

Heavenly Father, cause the newness of life to continue to flow through my heart, that I may not be fatigued, as I struggle with discouragements. Release me from hopeless cares that I have made mine, thinking they were thine. May I trust in the boundless limit of thy mercy, and rejoice in the world of living light. Amen.

Know[3.4-35], Prov[048], Thom[104]

24 May (Day 144 / 221)

I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
I ask not: but unless God send his hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet, or stifling snow,
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
He guides me and the bird.
--Robert Browning

To live in the presence of great truths and eternal laws--that is what keeps a man patient when the world ignores him, and calm and unspoiled when the world praises him. --Honore Balzac

But whoso putteth his trust in Jehovah shall be safe. --Proverbs 29.25

Lord Jehovah, all goodness, tenderness, and forbearance that are in my life have come from thee. May I not lose them in self, but by them make possible happiness and endurance for others. Amen.

Know[3.4-36], ZenT[032], Matt[048]

25 May (Day 145 / 220)

Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?
Loved the wild rose, and left it on the stalk?
At rich men's tables eaten bread and pulse?
Unarmed faced danger with a heart of trust?
And loved so well a high behavior,
In man or maid, that thou from speech refrained,
Nobility more noble to repay?
O, be my friend and teach me to be thine!
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others.
--Confucius

Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go. --Proverbs 22.24

Lord God, may I live for the pure and upright, and have the blessedness of a rejoicing heart. May I yearn for the secrets of nature. Grant that my life may not seek destruction, but tenderly find and protect life. Amen.

Know[3.4-37], Ench[049], TaoT[009]

26 May (Day 146 / 219)

Let us disengage ourselves from care about the passing things of time; let us soar above our worldly possessions. The bee does not less need its wings when it has gathered an abundant store, for if it sinks in the honey, it dies.
--Saint Augustine

Perhaps if we could penetrate nature's secrets, we should find that what we call needs are more essential to the well-being of the world than the most precious grain or fruit. --Nathaniel Hawthorne

We trust the Lord in faith serene,
A ladder he hath given;
The lower rounds in earth are seen,
The higher reach to heaven.
--Thomas Brevior

Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?
--Matthew 6.25

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.
--Lewis B. Smedes

Almighty God, I bless thee for the privilege of a great life. May I not be satisfied to rest with idle hands in youth and make age regretful because I have lived a useless life: but with a clear eye and an exalted mind may I choose the "durable satisfactions" that may be mine. Amen.

Know[3.4-38], Prov[049], Thom[105]

27 May (Day 147 / 218)

To your judgments give ye not the reins
With too much eagerness, like him who ere
The corn be ripe, is fain to count the grains:
For I have seen the briar through the winter snows
Look sharp and stiff--yet on a future day
High on its summit bear the tender rose:
And ship I've seen, that through the storm hath passed,
Securely bounding o'er the watery way,
At entrance of the harbor wrecked at last.
--Dante translated by Wright

…to think only thoughts that are pure and gentle, and to be happy under all circumstances, such blessed conditions and such beauty of character and life should be the aim of all, and particularly so of those who wish to lessen the misery of the world. --James Allen

Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding.
--Proverbs 3.5

The most common form of despair is not being who you are.
--Søren Kierkegaard

Lord God, help me to know my ability, that I may not attempt with weakness that which requires strength to undertake; and make me stable that I may not relax vigilance even though victory seems assured. Amen.

Know[3.4-39], Matt[049], Thom[106]

28 May (Day 148 / 217)

The bird let loose in eastern skies,
When hastening fondly home,
Ne'er stoops to earth her wing, nor flies
Where idle warblers roam;
But high she shoots through air and light,
Above all low delay,
Where nothing earthly bounds her flight,
Nor shadow dims her way.
--Thomas Moore

Remember, the essence of religion is, a heart void of offense toward God and man; not subtle speculative opinions, but an active principle of faith.
--William Pitt

God of mercy, reveal to me the hallowed life. May I be reminded that, while I may save and keep the dust from things that perish, my life, though unkept and undeveloped, tells in itself the value and need of the most watchful care. Amen.

Know[3.4-40], Ench[050], TaoT[010]

29 May (Day 149 / 216)

Though hearts brood o'er the past, our eyes
With smiling features glisten;
For lo! our day bursts up the skies,
Lean out your souls and listen!
The world is following freedom's way,
And ripening with her sorrow;
Take heart! Who bears the cross to-day
Shall wear the crown to-morrow.
--Gerald Massey

The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing. --Socrates

Lord God, may I never feel that I have a right to sell thy joys, nor the privilege of giving away my burdens. Grant that I may not forsake my principles, but may I keep the way clear that memory may find an unruffled rest. Amen.

Know[3.4-41], Prov[050], Thom[107]

30 May (Day 150 / 215)

Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune. --William James

It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.
--Epictetus

The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails. --William Arthur Ward

For after all, the best thing one can do when it is raining is let it rain.
--Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Father in Heaven, help me to accept things as they are. Show me how to embrace the present moment and find peace within its uncertainties. Guide me to let go of my desire for control and surrender to the natural flow of life. Teach me to trust in your divine plan. Amen.

Know[3.4-42], ZenT[033], Matt[050]

31 May (Day 151 / 214)

We have heard it said that reason is a blind guide, and that it draws men away from Truth rather than leads them to it. If this were true, it were better to remain, or to become, unreasonable, and to persuade others so to do. We have found, however, that the diligent cultivation of the divine faculty of reason brings about calmness and mental poise, and enables one to meet cheerfully the problems and difficulties of life. It is true there is a higher light than reason; even that of the Spirit of Truth itself, but without the aid of reason, Truth cannot be apprehended. They who refuse to trim the lamp of reason will never, whilst they so refuse, perceive the light of Truth, for the light of reason is a reflection of that Light. --James Allen

We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far. --Swami Vivekananda

Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be affrighted at them: for Jehovah thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.
--Deuteronomy 31.6

My Father, give me joyful courage to squarely face my life. Help me to know that I cannot vanquish life by evading duties, nor encircling myself with indulgences. If I may be blind to my situation, restore my sight that I may make ready a worthy passage with thee. Amen.

Know[3.4-43], Ench[051], TaoT[011]

Take the time as this month ends to indulge in personal reflection. Applaud your victories, reconcile with setbacks, and savor the experiences of life. Look toward the new month, where unknown adventures await! Set your mind to your purpose. Be thankful for every new day.

01 June (Day 152 / 213)

Every idea of ours points beyond itself, every volition binds us in decision, and every experience gets meaning by our attitudes. The most immediate task which life demands from us in the understanding of ourselves and of others is, therefore, to interpret our ideas, to draw the consequences of our will, to appreciate the attitudes, to measure them by higher standards.
--Hugo Münsterberg.

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
--Genesis 1.26

One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular. --C.G. Jung

My Creator, I pray that I may not only have the desire to know life, but the assurance to live it. Help me to understand that my earthly possessions are not the measure of my life, nor my body the boundary of my living. May I reach for the high standards that are free, without limit, to all. Amen.

Review Step 6 this month; Prov[051], Thom[108]

02 June (Day 153 / 212)

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

No man is free who is not master of himself. --Epictetus

A man's own character is his fate. --Sophocles

Labor is necessary to excellence. This is an eternal truth, although vanity cannot be taught to believe or indolence to heed it. --John Randolph

Almighty God, I regret the hours of indiscretion and waste; through thy forgiveness may I have thy help over past wrongs. May I have a deeper conception of a profitable life, that I may hereafter live by it. Amen.

Know[3.4-44], Matt[051], Thom[109]

03 June (Day 154 / 211)

Certainly, let the board be spread and let the bed be dressed for the traveler; but let not the emphasis of hospitality lie in these things. Honor to the house where they are simple to the verge of hardship, so that there the intellect is awake and reads the law of the universe, the soul worships truth and love, honor and courtesy flow into all deeds. --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Kind actions, and good wishes, and pure thoughts
No mystery is here: Here is no boon
For high--yet not for low: The smoke ascends
To heaven as lightly from the cottage hearth
As from the haughtiest palace.
--William Wordsworth.

The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make it.
--Marcus Aurelius

Gracious Father, I beseech thee to give me wisdom for kind thoughts and deeds. Teach me true hospitality, that I may be gracious in my own home and appreciative in the home of others. May I not temper my hospitality for certain reasons, but have a genuine welcome for all. Amen.

Know[3.4-45], Ench[052], TaoT[012]

04 June (Day 155 / 210)

This is the gospel of labor--ring it,
Ye bells of the kirk--
The Lord of Love came down from above
To live with the men who work.
This is the rose he planted, here
In the thorn-cursed soil;
Heaven is blest with perfect rest, but
The blessing of earth is toil.
--Henry van Dyke

No man is born into the world whose work
Is not born with him. There is always work
And tools to work withal, for those who will;
And blessed are the horny hands of toil.
--James Russell Lowell.

Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest.
--Exodus 23. 12.

My Father, I pray for the love of work, and the desire to cultivate life. Stir me, that I may be ambitious. May I not stare at life in an everyday way and forget that others are watching for the surprises. Help me to be considerate and kind in all that I do. Amen.

Know[3.4-46], Prov[052], Thom[110]

05 June (Day 156 / 209)

You think that upon the score of foreknowledge and divining I am infinitely inferior to the swans. When they perceive approaching death they sing more merrily than before, because of the joy they have in going to the God they serve.
--Socrates.

O yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.
--Alfred Tennyson.

How precious is thy lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings. --Psalm 36. 7.

Eternal God, forbid that I should try to set up thy judgment-seat in so small a place as self. My soul lives anew as I think of thy love. Amen.

Know[3.4-47], ZenT[034], Matt[052]

06 June (Day 157 / 208)

These stones that make the meadow brooklet murmur
Are the keys on which it plays.
O'er every shelving rock its touch grows firmer,
Resounding notes to raise.
If every path o'er which footsteps wander,
Were smooth as ocean strand,
There were no theme for gratitude and wonder
At God's delivering hand.
--W. E. Winks.

A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love. --Saint Basil

My Father, if rain may come to-day, may I realize its help, with the power of the sun, to increase life; and may its influence be sweet and wholesome to me, as I learn that sadness is temporary and will disappear with the coming of gladness. May I go search for the joy that may be mine to-day. Amen.

Know[3.4-48], Ench[053], TaoT[013]

07 June (Day 158 / 207)

When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead--
When the cloud is scattered
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken
Sweet tones are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken
Loved accents are soon forgot.
--Percy Bysshe Shelley.

A slip of the rose may take root, and bring forth a bloom to give peace to the soul. A slip of the tongue may take root, and bring forth a thorn that will torture the soul. --M.B.S.

You do not have a soul.
You are a soul.
--George MacDonald [Paraphrased]

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. --John 15. 4.

Many of us, O Father, overlook the fragrance of the rose while we are being pierced by its thorn. Increase my faith in life and in thee, that I may not be dismayed over mysteries, but sincerely wait for deliverance. Amen.

Know[3.4-49], Prov[053], Thom[111]

08 June (Day 159 / 206)

If one touch of nature makes the whole world kin, methinks that sweet and wonderful thing sympathy is not less powerful. What golden barriers, what ice of centuries, it can melt in a moment! --Charles Reade.

If I had two loaves of bread, I would sell one to buy white hyacinths to feed my soul. -- Omar Khayyam

What do you live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?
--George Eliot.

Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. --James 1. 27.

My Father, may I possess the spirit of forgiveness and consideration, that I may not hold prejudice and revenge, but help with sympathy and tenderness. Amen.

Know[3.4-50], Matt[053], Thom[112]

09 June (Day 160 / 205)

Reflect upon your present blessings of which every man has many; not upon your past misfortunes, of which all have some. --Charles Dickens.

'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home!
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which, sought through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
Home! home! sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home!
--John Howard Payne.

For thou shalt forget thy misery; Thou shalt remember it as waters that are passed away. --Job 11. 16.

Lord God, my soul fills with gratitude for the blessings which I have received and enjoyed. Help me to conform to thy will concerning my duties. May I not try to resist thy providence. I pray that thou wilt bless my daily life, and make my home a place to dispense kindness and cheerfulness. Amen.

Know[3.4-51], TaoT[014], Thom[113]

10 June (Day 161 / 204)

What have you done with your soul, my friend?
Where is the ray you were wont to send,
Glancing bright through the outer night,
Touching with hope what was dark before,
Glimmering on to the further shore?
--Arthur C. Benson.

God suffers the light to know eclipse,

Dashes the cup from the eager lips;
You perchance would have drunk too deep.
--Arthur C. Benson.

Lift where you stand. --Edward Everett Hale.

Almighty God, help me to correct my mistakes, and to be more careful of what I take in my life. May I always stretch out a hand of love to inspire others with confidence to care more for themselves and more for thee. Amen.

Know[3.4-52], ZenT[035], Prov[054]

11 June (Day 162 / 203)

Exceeding gifts from God are not blessings, they are duties. They do not always increase a man's happiness; they always increase his responsibilities.
--Charles Kingsley.

Make a rule and pray for help to keep it. Once a day spare room for a thought that will pursue a strong purpose. Help in some way the progress of a weary soul who cannot repay you. --M. B. S.

There is no true potency, remember, but that of help; nor true ambition, but ambition to save. --John Ruskin.

And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thine obscurity be as the noon day.
--Isaiah 58. 10.

Heavenly Father, when I think of how little I have given away my heart burns with shame, as I recall what thou hast given to me. May I from this day be more thoughtful of thy tender compassion by being less selfish. Amen.

Know[3.4-53], Matt[054], Thom[114]

12 June (Day 163 / 202)

Do to-day's duty, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking-forward to things which you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them. --Charles Kingsley.

Genuine religion has its roots deep down in the heart of humanity.... The actions of the Deity make no appeal to any special sense. We are deaf and blind, therefore, to the imminent grandeur around us unless we have insight enough to appreciate the whole and to recognize the woven fabric of existence flowing steadily from the loom of an infinite progress toward perfection.
--Sir Oliver Lodge.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. --James 1. 17.

Gracious Father, forbid that I should make thee regret thy gifts to me; and if I have failed to appreciate them, look upon me with pity, for I have cheated myself more than I have thee. Give me a deeper appreciation, that I may be strengthened day by day in the veriest duties of life. Amen.

Know[3.4-54], TaoT[015]

13 June (Day 164 / 201)

Beyond all wealth, honor, or even health, is the attachment we form to noble souls, because to become one with the good, generous, and true is to become, in a measure, good, generous, and true ourselves.
--Thomas Arnold.

Open thy bosom, set thy wishes wide, and let in manhood--let in happiness; admit the boundless theater of thought from nothing up to God ... which makes a man. --Thomas Young.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up. --Ecclesiastes 4. 9, 10.

Heavenly Father, I thank thee for good friends, and for the delight that dwells in fellowship. Give me the power to apprehend love, and guard me against the ways to lose it. May I look to my friends to help me to be pure, and to help me live my truest life. Amen.

Know[3.4-55], Prov[055]

14 June (Day 165 / 200)

When you get into a tight place, and everything goes against you till it seems as if you couldn't hold on a minute longer, never give up then, for that's just the time and place that the tide will turn.
--Harriet Beecher Stowe.

I cannot do it alone,
The waves run fast and high,
And the fogs close chill around,
And the light goes out in the sky;
But I know that we two
Shall win in the end--
God and I.
--Unknown.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not.
--Hebrews 10. 23.

Almighty God, I pray that thou wilt sustain me when I may be enduring for a purpose, and to accomplish it seems beyond my strength. Renew me with courage, and give me unceasing hope, and faith to hold out to the end. Amen.

Know[3.4-56], Matt[055]

15 June (Day 166 / 199)

What is rightly done stays with us, to support another right beyond, or higher up; whatever is wrongly done vanishes; and by the blank, betrays what we would have built above. --John Ruskin.

The seed ye sow another reaps,
The wealth ye find another keeps,
The robe ye weave another wears,
The arms ye forge another bears.
--Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not.
O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.
--Lamentations 3. 57, 58.

Lord God, reveal to me my selfishness if I am receiving much and giving little to satisfy life. May I be grateful and considerate of all those who labor to give me comfort and happiness. Amen.

Know[3.4-57], TaoT[016]

16 June (Day 167 / 198)

When to the sessions of sweet, solemn thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.
--William Shakespeare.

Seldom can the heart be lonely
If it seek a lonelier still--
Self-forgetting, seeking only
Emptier cups of love to fill.
--F. R. Havergal.

The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary. --Isaiah 50. 4.

Gracious Father, keep within me that cheer and courage which never has a place for weary murmurings; and with peace make the hours of solitude profitable as they pass. Help me to seek those who are in need of sympathy and encouragement, that I may help them to have a tranquil life. Amen.

Know[3.4-58], ZenT[036], Prov[056]

17 June (Day 168 / 197)

Many a genius has been slow of growth. Oaks that flourish for a thousand years do not spring up into beauty like a reed. --George Henry Lewes.

He who plants a tree
Plants a hope.
Rootlets up through fibers blindly grope,
Leaves unfold unto horizons free.
So man's life must climb
From the clods of time
Unto heavens sublime.
Canst thou prophesy, thou little tree,
What the glory of the boughs shall be?
--Lucy Larcom.

Very early, I perceived that the object of life is to grow. --Margaret Fuller.

And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
--Luke 2. 52.

Almighty God, thy power is so great I cannot express it; help me to comprehend the meaning of it, that I may feel more profoundly thy expectations of my life. May I remember that to forget that life is eternal may make me to lose all it has grown. Amen.

Know[3.4-59], Matt[056]

18 June (Day 169 / 196)

Not he the threatening texts who deals
Is highest 'mong the preachers,
But he who feels the woes and weals
Of all God's wandering creatures.
He doth good work whose heart can find
The spirit 'neath the letter;
Who makes his kind of happier mind,
Leaves wiser men and better.
Dear Bard and Brother! let who may
Against thy faults be railing,
(Though far, I pray, from us be they
That never had a failing!)
--James Russell Lowell.

A friend is the first person who comes in when the whole world has gone out.
--Unknown.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may not be so occupied in expressing my judgment of others, that I will forget to live in thy judgment myself. May I have the compassion for others that I hope to receive from thee. Amen.

Know[3.4-60], TaoT[017]

19 June (Day 170 / 195)

Find your niche and fill it. If it is ever so little, if it is only a hewer of wood or a drawer of water, do something in the great battle for God and truth.
--Charles Spurgeon.

If I do what I may in earnest, I need not mourn if I work no great work on earth. To help the growth of a thought that struggles toward the light; to brush with gentle hand the stain from the white of one snowdrop--such be my ambition. --George Macdonald.

Jehovah thy God will bless thee in all thy work, and in all that thou puttest thy hand unto. --Deuteronomy 15. 10.

Lord God, I pray that I may not through conceit be betrayed into slacking my work, or through visions of greatness lose it. Teach me how to obtain the secret wealth in the smallest thing; and may I recognize thy treasures, and fill my life with the finest that may be given me. Amen.

Know[3.4-61], Prov[057]

20 June (Day 171 / 194)

If the soft hand of winning Pleasure leads
By living waters, and through flowery meads,
Where all is smiling, tranquil, and serene,
Oh! teach me to elude each latent snare,
And whisper to my sliding heart, "Beware!"
With caution let me hear the Syren's voice,
And doubtful, with a trembling heart rejoice.
If friendless in a vale of tears I stray,
Where briars wound, and thorns perplex my way,
Still let my steady soul thy goodness see,
And, with a strong confidence, lay hold on Thee.
--Anna Letitia Barbauld.

For thou, O God, hast proved us: Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. --Psalm 66. 10.

With pride, there are many curses. With humility, there come many blessings. --Ezra Taft Benson

O Lord, teach me to select my pleasures with care, that I may not plunge into joyful moments that are irretrievable. May I indulge in the pleasures that bring happiness and not weariness. Grant that I may have the honor to protect others from harm and loss, as I engage in my pleasures and in my work. Amen.

Know[3.4-62], Matt[057]

21 June (Day 172 / 193)

In our eagerness to solve life we start out to trace its mysteries and trample God's truths as we search. As we return we discover the shattered treasures, and gladly stoop to gather up the fragments, and with them translate the revelations of the soul. --M.B.S.

The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears. --Native American Proverb

I stretch my hands out in the empty air;
I strain my eyes into the heavy night;
Blackness of darkness!--Father, hear my prayer;
Grant me to see the light!
--George Arnold.

But when he came to himself he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father. --Luke 15. 17, 18.

Heavenly Father, I pray that as I search for the truth I will not be so eager to seek thy mysteries as I am to extend thy ministries. Grant that by thy love I will be guided in comprehending and exalting thy kingdom. May my service bring me wisdom as I obey thy laws. Amen.

Know[3.4-63], ZenT[037], TaoT[018]

22 June (Day 173 / 192)

The safe and general antidote against sorrow is employment. Sorrow is a kind of rust in the soul, which every new idea contributes in its passage to scour away.
--Dr. Johnson.

We may be sure that one principle will hold throughout the whole pursuit of thoughtful happiness--the principle that the best way to secure future happiness is to be as happy as is rightfully possible to-day. To secure any desirable capacity for the future, near or remote, cultivate it to-day. What would be the use of immortality for a person who cannot use well half an hour? --Charles W. Eliot.

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not. --Isaiah 35. 3, 4.

Loving Father, help me that I may realize the depth of thy love. If I may be discouraged over my failures, speak to me hopefully and lead me out where I may find the right way to succeed. May I not be kept in sorrow, but find each day the happiness that brings a thankful heart. Amen.

Know[3.4-64], Prov[058]

23 June (Day 174 / 191)

Could we by a wish
Have what we will and get the future now,
Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of his light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.
--Robert Browning.

Tomorrow is another day.
--Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind, 1936

Press not thy purpose on thy Lord,
Urge not thy erring will,
Nor dictate to the Eternal mind
Nor doubt thy Maker's skill.
--Lydia H. Sigourney.

Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; For in thee do I trust: Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; For I lift up my soul unto thee. --Psalm 143. 8.

My Father, help me to see that in my portion of work thou hast entrusted me to help further thy kingdom. Correct me if I am wrong in interpreting thy way. May I concentrate my mind and make my heart and hands do the work which thou hast given for me to do. Amen.

Know[3.4-65], Matt[058]

24 June (Day 175 / 190)

All the world cries, "Where is the man who will save us?" Don't look so far for this man, you have him at hand. This man--it is you, it is I, it is each one of us! How to constitute oneself a man? Nothing harder if one knows not how to will it; nothing easier if one wills it. --Alexandre Dumas.

Many of our troubles are God dragging us, and they would end if we would stand upon our feet and go whither he would have us.
--Henry Ward Beecher.

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and mine ordinances; which if a man do, he shall live in them. --Leviticus 18. 5.

Gracious Lord, I pray that I may have reverence for that which is pure and holy, and that my soul may delight in the presence of the good. Help me to so live that I may have the memory of precious deeds, and that I may not have to depend on the service of others to supply contentment for my closing days. Amen.

Know[3.4-66], TaoT[019]

25 June (Day 176 / 189)

In every feast remember there are two guests to be entertained—the body and the soul; and what you give the body you presently lose, but what you give the soul remains forever. --Epictetus.

We take pains and weary to faultlessly clothe the body. We persevere, and often struggle, to adorn the mind. As we pass through the rays of truth, sometimes we find, after all we have put on, we have left bare the soul.
--M.B.S.

For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? --Matthew 16. 26.

Lord God, help me to understand that thou hast made the principle of truth so that I cannot add to it, nor take from it, lest in altering it I might destroy it. May I never try to make my purpose cover the truth, but without fear, face the light where truth shines the brightest. Amen.

Know[3.4-67], Prov[059]

26 June (Day 177 / 188)

Why are we so glad to talk and take our turns to prattle, when so rarely we get back to the stronghold of our silence with an unwounded conscience?
--Thomas a Kempis.

Oppose the sentiments of a solitary man, who has passed his life in pious conference with God, to those which occupy a worldly mind, forgetful of its Creator, and sacrificing its dearest interests to the enjoyment of the moment: compare the character of a wise man, who reflects in silence on the importance of eternity, with that of a fashionable being, who consumes his time in the idle amusements of the world; and we shall then perceive that solitude and dignified retirement, can alone afford true pleasure, and give us what all the vain enjoyments of the world will never bestow, consolation in death, and hope in everlasting life. --Amos Wilson, the Pennsylvania Hermit

Speech is like the cloth of Arras opened and put abroad, whereby the imagery doth appear in figure; whereas in thoughts they lie but as in packs.
--Plutarch.

Keep thy tongue from evil, And thy lips from speaking guile.
--Psalm 34. 13.

Tender Father, make me more watchful of the time that I give to useless thoughts and words, and save me from cutting words, which make deeper impressions than can be cut with sharp tools. Forgive me for the hours that have not been profitable; I would I had them back, for my heart has need of them. Amen.

Know[3.4-68], ZenT[038], Matt[059]

27 June (Day 178 / 187)

Of course, it was not easy at first to fly. The speech wings were weak and broken; nothing was left save the impulse to fly, but that was something. One can never consent to creep when one has an impulse to soar. There are so many difficulties in the way, so many discouragements; but I kept on trying, knowing that perseverance and patience win in the end. --Helen Keller.

Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding. Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain. And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy… Much of your pain is self-chosen. It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self. --Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet, "On Pain"

In the years the answer lies,
Beyond where brood the grieving skies
And Night drops tears.
Where Faith rod-chastened smiles to rise
And doff its fears,
And carping Sorrow pines and dies—
Beyond the years.

Beyond the years the prayer for rest
Shall beat no more within the breast;
The darkness clears,
And Morn perched on the mountain's crest
Her form uprears—
The day that is to come is best,
Beyond the years.

Beyond the years the soul shall find
That endless peace for which it pined,
For light appears,
And to the eyes that still were blind
With blood and tears,
Their sight shall come all unconfined
Beyond the years.
--Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Weeping may tarry for the night, But joy cometh in the morning.
--Psalm 30. 5.

My Father, I thank thee for life and its faculties. May I not be deceived by gratification and miss the permanent satisfactions. Make me brave that I may be courageous in affliction, and not be dismayed over humiliations and disappointments. May I be kept in harmony with thy will. Amen.

Know[3.4-69], TaoT[020]

28 June (Day 179 / 186)

The farmer must scatter all his seed upon the land, and then leave it to the elements. Were he to covetously hoard his seed, he would lose both it and his produce, for his seed would perish. It perishes when he sows it, but in perishing it brings forth a great abundance. So in life, we get by giving; we grow rich by scattering. The man who says he is in possession of knowledge which he cannot give out because the world is incapable of receiving it, either does not possess such knowledge, or, if he does, will soon be deprived of it, if he is not already so deprived. To hoard is to lose; to exclusively retain is to be dispossessed.
--James Allen

Leisure and I have parted company.
I look upon the world as my parish.
The best of all is, God is with us.
To overdo is to undo.
--John Wesley.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only. --James 1. 22.

Lord God, I pray for a desire to work. May I not be deceived in my convictions, and work for that of which I may afterward be ashamed. Lead me into a clear conception of right and wrong. Help me to see as thou dost see, that I may walk with confidence in thy steps. Amen.

Know[3.4-70], Prov[060]

29 June (Day 180 / 185)

Let the mind be enlarged ... to the grandeur of the mysteries, and not the mysteries contracted to the narrowness of the mind. --Sir Francis Bacon

Mind is not awareness. Learning is not the path. --Zen Proverb

The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance - it is the illusion of knowledge. --Daniel J. Boorstin

Words cannot describe everything. The heart's message cannot be delivered in words. If one receives words literally, he will be lost. If he tries to explain in words, he will not attain enlightenment in this life. --Zen Proverb

Father of all, I pray that I may not confuse myself with mysteries beyond my comprehension. Help me to focus on those things I can understand and to attempt those things I can accomplish. Help me to make the world a better place because you put me in it. Amen.

Know[3.4-71], Matt[060]

30 June (Day 181 / 184)

Be useful where thou livest, that they may
Both want and wish thy pleasing presence still;
Kindness, good parts, great places are the way
To compass this. Find out men's wants and will,
And meet them there. All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses.
--George Herbert.

Thrice happy he, who by some shady grove,
Far from the clamorous world, doth live his own;
Though solitary, who is not alone,
But doth converse with that eternal love.
--William Drummond.

Seek, and ye shall find. --Matthew 7. 7.

My Father, help me to draw from the wisdom of life, that my soul may grow in knowledge and power. May I have the quiet confidence that comes in trusting thee. May I help others to think on the uplifting things of life. Amen.

Know[3.4-72], TaoT[021]

Pause and consider this closing month. Celebrate your accomplishments, learn from challenges, and absorb the lessons etched in each day. Now, turn the page with anticipation. Let the upcoming month unfold with purposeful goals and the determination to make every day count.

01 July (Day 182 / 183)

There is no unbelief!
Whoever plants a seed beneath a sod,
And waits to see it push away the clod,
He trusts in God.
There is no unbelief!
And day by day, and night, unconsciously,
The heart lives by that faith the lips deny--
God knoweth why.
--Bulwer Lytton.

More and more I see that nothing is so necessary for the religious condition of the mind as absolute simplicity. We know what we have got to do, and the only thing is to ask ourselves whether we are doing it as well as we can.
--George Frederick Watts.

My Creator, I praise thee for the knowledge of life, and the hope of immortality. Help me to express my belief, and to give my utmost for the divinest, that I may be worthy of life eternal. Amen.

Review Step 7 this month; ZenT[039], Prov[061]

02 July (Day 183 / 182)

One step more, and the race is ended;
One word more, and the lesson's done;
One toil more, and a long rest follows
At set of sun.
Who would fail, for one step withholden?
Who would fail, for one word unsaid?
Who would fail, for a pause too early?
Sound sleep the dead.
--Christina G. Rossetti.

One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake.
--Robert Browning.

He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. --Matthew 10. 22.

My Father, thou hast proven the strength of thy promises. May I be trustful, and be thankful to "see so much as one side of a celestial idea, one side of the rainbow, and the sunset sky." Amen.

Know[3.4-73], Matt[061]

03 July (Day 184 / 181)

Not from the dangers that beset our path
From storm or sudden death, or pain or wrath,
We pray deliverance;
But from the envious eye, the narrowed mind
Of those that are the vultures of mankind
Thy aid advance.
Not at the strong man's righteous rage or hate,
But at the ambushed malice laid in wait
Thy strength arise;
At those who ever seek to spot the fair
White garments of a neighbor's character
With mud of lies.
--Theodosia P. Garrison.

Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings. --1 Peter 2. 1.

What happens is not as important as how you react to what happens.
--Ellen Glasgow

My Lord, may I remember that to protect the character of others is to add virtue to my own. Grant that I may see the good and not be looking for the evil. Cause me to know that peace will not abide in deceit or revenge, but may be found in a happy and charitable spirit. Help me to earn thy peace. Amen.

Know[3.4-74], TaoT[022]

04 July (Day 185 / 180)

Seek not to keep your soul perpetually in the unwholesome region of remorse. It was needful to pass through that dark valley, but it is infinitely dangerous to linger there too long. --Nathaniel Hawthorne.

And this city shall be to me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them.
--Jeremiah 33. 9.

Always keep an open mind and a compassionate heart. --Phil Jackson

Father, forgive that I should be judgmental when my heart is small, and make decisions in thy stead. My soul is reborn each time I consider thy love, and there is no place where thy grace is hidden from me if I but seek it. Amen.

Know[3.4-75], Prov[062]

05 July (Day 186 / 179)

Nature alone can speak to our intelligence an imperishable language, never changing, because it remains within the bounds of eternal truth and of what is absolutely noble and beautiful. --George Sand.

Say, dost thou understand the whispered token,
The promise breathed from every leaf and flower?
And dost thou hear the word ere it be spoken,
And apprehend love's presence by its power?
--Unknown.

But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; And the birds of the heavens, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; And the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these, That the hand of Jehovah hath wrought this? --Job 12. 7-9.

Lord God, direct me away from self, that I may learn of thy wisdom, and help further thy kingdom. Give me patience to search for thy noble truths, that I may obtain them to use for thy service. Amen.

Know[3.4-76], Matt[062]

06 July (Day 187 / 178)

No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession, and every man worthy of the name will row long against wind and tide before he allows himself to cry out, "I'm baffled!" and submit to be floated passively back to land. --Charlotte Brontë.

There is nothing so small but that we honor God by asking his guidance of it, or insult him by taking it into our hands. --John Ruskin.

If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, And thy right hand shall hold me.
--Psalm 139. 9, 10.

My Father, I pray that I may have wise judgment and use discretion in the choice of my work. May I remember that only that is genuine which is received and used for thee. Amen.

Know[3.4-77], ZenT[040], TaoT[023]

07 July (Day 188 / 177)

The surest way not to fail is to determine to succeed. --Richard B. Sheridan.

I felt my hot blood a-tingling flow;
With thrill of the fight my soul did glow;
And when, braced and pure,
I emerged secure
From the strife that had tried my courage so,
I said, "Let heaven send me sun or rain,
I'll never know flinching fear again."
--Thomas Crawford.

For the Lord Jehovah will help me; therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. --Isaiah 50. 7.

Lord Jehovah, help me to learn how to be strong and brave, that I may not remain in fear and weakness. Help me to conquer unworthiness, and to overcome discouragements, that I may be spared the needless battles that are brought on through impatience and selfishness. Keep my soul in repose, that I may add to my conquering strength. Amen.

Know[3.4-78], Prov[063]

08 July (Day 189 / 176)

Neither gold nor grandeur can render us happy. --La Fontaine.

Spirit of God! descend upon my heart;
Wean it from earth; through all its pulses move;
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,
And make me love thee as I ought to love.
I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,
No sudden rending of the veil of clay:
No angel visitant, no opening skies--
But take the dimness of my soul away.
--George Croly.

For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. --Luke 12. 15.

To win without risk is to triumph without glory. -- Pierre Corneille

Eternal God, help me to honor my life; and may I realize, whether I select good or bad, much or little, the harvesting is for eternity. Grant that I may not make my life accumulate gold and grandeur, but strive to make my life worthy. Amen.

Know[3.4-79], Matt[063]

09 July (Day 190 / 175)

Discretion of speech is more than eloquence; and to speak agreeably to him with whom we deal is more than to speak in good words or in good order.
--Francis Bacon.

When anyone provokes you, be assured it is your opinion which provokes you. Try therefore, in the first place, not to be hurried away with appearance. For if you once gain time and respite, you will more easily command yourself.
--Epictetus.

My Father, help me to learn through kindness and tenderness the value of self-control. Help me in the moods of jealousy and impatience, that I may not cause others unhappiness by words or deeds. Amen.

Know[3.4-80], TaoT[024]

10 July (Day 191 / 174)

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute to God himself.
--William Shakespeare.

His gain is loss; for he that wrongs his friend
Wrongs himself more, and ever has about
A silent court and jury, and himself
The prisoner at the bar, ever condemned.
--Alfred Tennyson.

My Father, help me to avoid the critical spirit that leans toward injustice. Grant that none may be made despondent waiting for my mercy; but through forgiveness may I inspire confidence in those who have made mistakes, and influence them to a better life. Amen.

Know[3.4-81], Prov[064]

11 July (Day 192 / 173)

A friend to chide me when I'm wrong,
My inmost soul to see:
And that my friendship prove as strong
For him as his for me.
--John Quincy Adams.

Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can: this is the service of a friend. --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool.
--Ecclesiastes 7. 5, 6.

My Father and Friend, who calleth me to check the progress of the wrong, make me submissive and eager for what is right, that I may learn and uphold to others thy purposes and desires. Amen.

Know[3.4-82], ZenT[041], Matt[064]

12 July (Day 193 / 172)

Each reaching and aspiration is an instinct with which all nature consists and cooperates, and therefore it is not in vain. If a man believes and expects great things of himself it makes no odds where you put him, he will be surrounded by grandeur. --Henry David Thoreau.

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost--that is where they should be: now put foundations under them. --Henry David Thoreau.

He is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock: and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it: because it had been well builded.
--Luke 6. 48.

Lord of strength, I pray that while I may lay a strong foundation for my life, I may remember that I should not delay the building by neglecting to complete the plans. May I look to-day and see if I am making my words stronger than my life. Help me to realize that the test of life is made with the soul. Amen.

Know[3.4-83], TaoT[025]

13 July (Day 194 / 171)

Let each day take thought for what concerns it, liquidate its own affairs, and respect the day which is to follow, and then it shall be ready. --Amiel.

What does your anxiety do? It does not empty to-morrow, brother, of its sorrow; but ah! it empties to-day of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil; it makes you unfit to cope with it if it comes. --Ian Maclaren.

Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. --Matthew 6. 25.

My Father, save me from the habit of borrowing. So often I borrow trouble and cannot use it, when the peace that I possess is all that I need. Help me, that I may not miss the glory of to-day, by anticipating the uncertainty of to-morrow; but may I discern my place and have delight in every day. Amen.

Know[3.4-84], Prov[065]

14 July (Day 195 / 170)

Sail fast, sail fast,
Ark of my hopes, Ark of my dreams;
Sweep lordly o'er the drowned Past,
Fly glittering through the sun's strange beams;
Sail fast, sail fast.
Breath of new buds from off some drying lea,
With news about the Future scent the sea;
My brain is beating like the heart of Haste.
I'll loose me a bird upon this Present waste;
Go, trembling song,
And stay not long; O, stay not long;
Thou art only a gray and sober dove,
But thine eye is faith and thy wing is love.
--Sidney Lanier.

God speed thee, pretty bird; may thy small nest,
With little ones all in good time be blest.
I love thee much;
For well thou managest that life of thine,
Well I!--O ask not what I do with mine!
Would I were such!
--Jane Welch Carlyle.

Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? --Matthew 6. 26.

My Father, may I start this day with more faith in myself and greater love for thy world. May my soul be ready for the joys of today. Amen.

Know[3.4-85], Matt[065]

15 July (Day 196 / 169)

His was the heart that overmuch
In human goodness puts its trust,
And his the keen, satiric touch
That shrivels falsehood into dust.
Fierce for the right, he bore his part
In strife with many a valiant foe;
But laughter winged his polished dart,
And kindness tempered every blow.
--William Winter.

A wise man will so act that whatever he does may rather seem voluntary and of his own free will than done by compulsion, however much he may be compelled by necessity. --Machiavelli.

Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him back to see what shall be after him? --Ecclesiastes 3. 22.

Lord God, may I not forget that it is in the light, and not the darkness, that my work is revealed. I beseech thee to pour in thy light as I plan my life, and open my heart and mind for the reception of thy truth. Amen.

Know[3.4-86], TaoT[026]

16 July (Day 197 / 168)

Reverence the highest, have patience with the lowest. Let this day's performance of the meanest duty be thy religion. Are the stars too distant? Pick up the pebble that lies at thy feet and from it learn all.
--Margaret Fuller.

The situation that has not its Duty, its Ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yet, here is this miserable, despicable Actual, wherein thou standest--here or nowhere is thy Ideal! Work it out therefrom! --Thomas Carlyle.

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward. --Matthew 10. 42.

Great God, may I begin this day bearing in mind that the things which I think and do are my life. I pray that thou wilt keep me from making great efforts for that which is valueless, and thus waste my life. May I watch my pride and indolence that they may not cause me to lose the best. Amen.

Know[3.4-87], ZenT[042], Prov[066]

17 July (Day 198 / 167)

So frail is the youth and beauty of men,
Though they bloom and look gay like the rose;
But all our fond cares to preserve them is vain,
Time kills them as fast as he goes.
Then I'll not be proud of my youth nor my beauty,
Since both of them wither and fade;
But gain a good name by well doing my duty;
For this will scent like the rose when I'm dead.
--Isaac Watts.

Onward, onward may we press
Through the path of duty;
Virtue is true happiness,
Excellence true beauty;
Minds are of supernal birth,
Let us make a heaven of earth.
--James Montgomery.

All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them. --Matthew 7. 12.

My Lord and my strength, I pray that I may possess that expectancy which comes in joyous hope and have the endurance that is controlled by courage and energy. Grant in the future that I may be less concerned about my living and more anxious for what I make of my life. Amen.

Know[3.4-88], Matt[066]

18 July (Day 199 / 166)

Learn to admire rightly: the great pleasure of life is that. Note what great men admired; they admired great things; narrow spirits admire basely and worship meanly. --W.M. Thackeray.

Our thoughts are often more than we are, just as they are often better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, and not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow men see us. We are always doing each other injustice, and thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear separate feelings or actions. We don't see each other's whole nature. --George Eliot.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. --Isaiah 35. 1.

Wisdom is knowing what to do next; virtue is doing it. --David Starr Jordan

Eternal God, may I become more like thee. Give me the desire to associate myself with people and places where the divine spirit is supreme. May my soul breathe in the influence of all that is good and true; and may I use my life for thy honor and praise. Amen.

Know[3.4-89], TaoT[027]

19 July (Day 200 / 165)

It is the little rift within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.
The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That rotting inward slowly molders all.
It is not worth the keeping: let it go:
But shall it? Answer, darling, answer no.
And trust me not at all or all in all.
--Alfred Tennyson.

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom. --Song of Solomon 2. 15.

Loving Father, help me to put away the distractions and cares that make me discontented. Grant that I may not set myself in "gilded pride" and keep out the precious things of life. Help me to abandon doubt and suspicion, and keep the faith that is happy to believe and willing to forgive. Amen.

Know[3.4-90], Prov[067]

20 July (Day 201 / 164)

I, and the bird,
And the wind together,
Sang a supplication
In the winter weather.
The bird sang for sunshine,
And the trees for winter fruit,
And for love in the spring time
When the thickets shoot.
And I sang for patience
When the teardrops start;
Clean hands and clear eyes,
And a faithful heart.
--Arthur C. Benson.

Unto thee, O Jehovah, do I lift up my soul. --Psalm 25. 1.

Let thy day be to the night
A letter of good tidings! Let thy praise
Go up as birds go up--that when they awake,
Shake off the dew and soar.
--Jean Ingelow.

Lord God, if I am discouraged this morning, may I pause for thine encouragement. Grant that the fear of the night may make no decline in my morn, but that "into the future I may fuse the past," and use what is clearest for to-day. Amen.

Know[3.4-91], Matt[067]

21 July (Day 202 / 163)

Our heaven must be within ourselves,
Our home and heaven the work of faith
And thro' this race of life which shelves
Downward to death.
While over all a dome must spread,
And love shall be that dome above;
And deep foundations must be laid,
And these are love.
--Christina Rossetti.

If happiness has not her seat
And center in the breast,
We may be wise or rich or great,
But never can be blest.
--Robert Burns.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.
--Proverbs 4.23

My Father, if I choose to be unhappy and miserable, may I not be to myself and friends as "a harp with one string." Help me to free myself from thinking and anticipating things that keep me from the pleasure that I might receive and give. May I have more trust in my friends and in thee. Amen.

Know[3.4-92], ZenT[043], TaoT[028]

22 July (Day 203 / 162)

He that of such a height hath built his mind,
And reared the dwelling of his thoughts so strong,
As neither fear nor hope can shake the frame
Of his resolved powers; nor all the wind
Of vanity or malice pierce to wrong
His settled peace, or to disturb the same:
What a fair seat hath he, from whence he may
The boundless wastes and wilds of man survey?
--Samuel Daniel.

How comes it to pass, then, that we appear such cowards in reasoning, and are so afraid to stand the test of ridicule? --Earl of Shaftesbury.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. --Isaiah 26. 3.

O Lord, it is not that I am ashamed to ask thee for the truth that I do not more diligently seek it, but it is because I fear the sacrifice that may follow in obtaining it. I would that I could understand that thy strength is given in the sacrifice. Make me braver as I seek to live in the truth. Amen.

Know[3.5-01], Prov[068]

23 July (Day 204 / 161)

I do not ask, O Lord, that life may be
A pleasant road;
I do not ask that thou would'st take from me
Aught of its load.
For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead:
Lead me aright--
Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed--
Through peace to light.
--Adelaide A. Procter.

O, why and whither?--God knows all,
I only know that he is good,
And that whatever may befall
Or here or there, must be the best that could.
--John G. Whittier.

Lead me, O Jehovah, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. --Psalm 5. 8.

Loving Father, may I never fail to ask for thy guidance, for thou hast promised to lead me to the cool springs while I pass through the desert places. Help me to put myself in thy keeping and say, "Thy will be done." Amen.

Know[3.5-02], Matt[068]

24 July (Day 205 / 160)

As the winged arrow flies
Speedily the mark to find;
As the lightning from the skies
Darts and leaves no trace behind;
Swiftly thus our fleeting days
Bear us down life's rapid stream;
Upward, Lord, our spirits raise;
All below is but a dream.
--John Newton.

O gentlemen! the time is short;
To spend that shortness basely were too long,
If life did ride upon a dial's point,
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
--William Shakespeare.

Jehovah, make me to know mine end, And the measure of my days, what it is; let me know how frail I am. --Psalm 39. 4.

Lord, forbid that I should overcast my life with intentions, and neglect to put in the deeds. May I not be satisfied to spend my days in being merely occupied, but live to learn and work. May I not be dismayed over what I might have been, but with all my might do what I can now. Amen.

Know[3.5-03], TaoT[029]

25 July (Day 206 / 159)

Blessed indeed are those ears which listen not after the voice which is sounding without, but after the truth teaching within. --Thomas à Kempis.

How joyed my heart in the rich melodies
That overhead and round me did arise!
The moving leaves--the water's gentle flow--
Delicious music hung on every bough.
Then said I in my heart, "If that the Lord
Such lively music on the earth accord;
If to weak, sinful man such sounds are given,
O! what must be the melody of heaven!'
--Izaak Walton.

But thou, O Jehovah, knowest me; thou seest me, and triest my heart toward thee. --Jeremiah 12. 3.

Loving Father, thou hast made it needful for me to know that the songs which are sung by divine love are rarely heard by cruel hearts. Grant that my soul may chord with the music that vibrates in the beauty and harmony of life. Amen.

Know[3.5-04], Prov[069]

26 July (Day 207 / 158)

I have learned, as days have passed me,
Fretting never lifts the load;
And worry, much or little,
Never smooths an irksome road;
For do you know that somehow, always,
Doors are opened, ways are made;
When we work and live in patience
Under all the cross that's laid.
--Unknown.

Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened, but go on in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace, like a clock during a thunderstorm.
--Robert L. Stevenson.

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil. --Proverbs 1. 33.

Merciful and just God, I pray that I may regulate my life by thy standards and conform my life to thy laws, that thy goodness and mercy may not be wasted on me. Help me to bear in mind, that willingness is the power that starts the hands to work. May I have thy presence while I wait in quietness, that I may be helped through the anxious moments. Amen.

Know[3.5-05], ZenT[044], Matt[069]

27 July (Day 208 / 157)

What's hallowed ground? 'Tis what gives birth
To sacred thoughts in souls of worth!
Peace! Independence! Truth!
Go forth Earth's compass round;
And your high-priesthood shall make earth
All hallowed ground.
--Thomas Campbell.

Remember the week day to keep it holy. --Elbert Hubbard.

The meaning of life comes to us mostly in great revealing flashes and intense emotions. --Dean Farrar.

To the pure all things are pure. --Titus 1. 15.

Gracious Father, may I not feel that it is necessary to wait for certain days and ceremonies to prepare to worship thee, while at every moment thy love is pleading for me. May I through the busiest hours and the most perplexing moments serve thee, and ever give praise to thy holy name. Amen.

Know[3.5-06], TaoT[030]

28 July (Day 209 / 156)

O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.
--George Matheson.

Follow your Star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine,
Forward, till you learn the highest Human Nature is divine.
Follow Light and do the Right--for man can half control his doom--
Till you see the deathless Angel seated in the vacant Tomb.
--Alfred Tennyson.

My soul waiteth for the Lord, More than watchmen wait for the morning; yea, more than watchmen for the morning. --Psalm 130. 6.

Almighty God, help me to kindle my life by the shining light of thy power and love, that I may be an ambassador for thee. Amen.

Know[3.5-07], Prov[070]

29 July (Day 210 / 155)

I wrestle not with rage
While fury's flame doth burn;
It is vain to stop the stream
Until the tide doth turn.
But when the flame is out
And ebbing wrath doth end
I turn a late enraged foe
Into a quiet friend.
--Robert Southwell.

If I can lend
A strong hand to the fallen, or defend
The right against a single envious strain,
My life though bare
Perhaps of much that seemeth dear and fair
To us on earth, will not have been in vain.
--Unknown.

A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity.
--Proverbs 17. 17.

Gracious Father of us all, if I may have cause to be provoked to-day, help me to rise above my angry passions, and not from weakness plunge into that for which I may be sorry. Make me self-forgetful, that I may be willing to make peace with those whom I may have displeased. Amen.

Know[3.5-08], Matt[070]

30 July (Day 211 / 154)

The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. Grief will not carry you one step into real nature; grief can teach me nothing.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Leave off, ye simple ones, and live; And walk in the way of understanding.
--Proverbs 9. 6.

You will lose someone you can’t live without,
and your heart will be badly broken,
and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss.
But this is also the good news.
--Ann Lamont

Sit down, sad soul, and count
The moments flying;
Come, tell the sweet amount
That's lost by sighing!
How many smiles?--a score?
Then laugh, and count no more;
For day is dying.
Lie down sad soul, and sleep,
And no more measure
The flight of time, nor weep
The loss of leisure;
But here by this lone stream,
Lie down with us, and dream
Of starry treasure.
--Bryan Waller Procter.

God of love, may I come quickly to thee, when I am in need of protection and sympathy. May I not allow grief to drag me into misery, but with strength and courage may I find happiness in thy daily will. Amen.

Know[3.5-09], ZenT[045], TaoT[031]

31 July (Day 212 / 153)

Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer;
Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
Thus on, till wisdom is pushed out of life.
Procrastination is the thief of time;
Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
And to the mercies of a moment leaves
The vast concerns of an eternal scene.
--Dr. Edward Young.

O, my friend, rise up and follow
Where the hand of God shall lead;
He has brought thee through affliction,
But to fit thee for his need.
--Mary Howitt.

For he is our God, And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To-day, O that ye would hear his voice! Harden not your heart.
--Psalm 95. 7, 8.

Lord God, I come to thee for help, that I may make more of my life. Steady me, that I may know its value without wavering, and the loss it sustains from wasted days. I pray that I may live more in thy commandments. Amen.

Know[3.5-10], Prov[071]

Take a moment to appraise your journey, recognize triumphs, and acknowledge lessons learned. With the dawn of a new month, chart your course with renewed purpose. Set aspirations, look forward to exciting endeavors, and savor the anticipation of what lies ahead.

01 August (Day 213 / 152)

Am I wrong to be always so happy? This world is full of grief;
Yet there is laughter of sunshine, to see the crisp green on the leaf,
Daylight is ringing with song-birds, and brooklets are crooning at night;
And why should I make a shadow when God makes all so bright?
Earth may be wicked and weary, yet cannot I help being glad!
There is sunshine without and within me, and how should I mope or be sad?
God would not flood me with blessings, meaning me only to pine
Amid all the bounties and beauties he pours upon me and mine;
Therefore I will be grateful, and therefore will I rejoice;
My heart is singing within me; sing on, O heart and voice.
--Walter C. Smith.

Experience is not what happens to you; it's what you do with what happens to you. -- Aldous Huxley

Gracious Father, my soul floods with joy for the blessings of life. May it be my privilege to be happy in them. Help me not to ask thee for anything which will cause loss to another; may I not delight in a lonely view, but as I see thy glory bring others to the vision also. Amen.

Review Step 8 this month; Know[3.5-11], Matt[071]

02 August (Day 214 / 151)

The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need;
Not what we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.
--James Russell Lowell.

And when o'er storm and jar I climb,
Beyond life's atmosphere,
I shall behold the lord of time
And space--of world and year.
O vain, far quest! not thus my heart
Shall ever find its goal!
I turn me home--and there thou art,
My Father, in my soul.
--George Macdonald.

That they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being. --Acts 17. 27, 28.

My gracious Father, may I not always be so eager for more of useless things. Help me to realize that thy spirit dwells in my soul. May I rejoice to receive thy grace and love every day. Amen.

Know[3.5-12], TaoT[032]

03 August (Day 215 / 150)

Set out in the very morning of your lives with a frank and manly determination to look simply for what is right and true in all things.... This is the only way to know God's will and do it. You may not find it at once, but you have set your face in the true direction to find it. --Jeremy Taylor.

The important thing in life is to have a great aim, and to possess the aptitude and perseverance to attain it. --Goethe.

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.
--Psalm 119. 2.

Lord God, forbid that I should lose the opportunities of making my life by waiting for sudden developments. Cause me to notice that the tree that bears fruit must first grow the blossom before it may be perfected by the sun: whether thou hast made me greater or less, may I be ashamed to live in untruth and wait in idleness. Amen.

Know[3.5-13], Prov[072]

04 August (Day 216 / 149)

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.
Yet if we could scorn
Hate and pride and fear,
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever could come near.
--Percy Bysshe Shelley.

It becomes no man to nurse despair, but in the teeth of clenched antagonisms to follow up the worthiest till he die. --Alfred Tennyson.

He suffered no man to do them wrong; Yea, he reproved kings for their sakes.
--1 Chronicles 16. 21.

My Father, I bless thee for thy patience and forbearance. I pray that thou wilt forgive me for all the sorrow that I have made from rebellion and despair, and with thy forgiveness may I receive patience and cheerful courage. Amen.

Know[3.5-14], ZenT[046], Matt[072]

05 August (Day 217 / 148)

It is given to us sometimes, even in our everyday life, to witness the saving influence of a noble nature, the divine efficacy of rescue that may lie in a self-subduing act of fellowship. --George Eliot.

To live within a cave--it is most good;
But if God made a day,
And some one come, and say,
"Lo! I have gathered faggots in the wood!"
E'en let him stay,
And light a fire, and fan a temporal mood!
So sit till morning! when the light is grown
That he the path can read,
Then bid the man Godspeed!
His morning is not thine: yet must thou own
Those ashes on the stone.
They have a cheerful warmth.
--Thomas Edward Brown.

And the King shall answer and say unto them, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me."
--Matthew 25. 40.

Father of mankind, may I not be a barrier to the discouraged, but help them in the ways of encouragement. May I not allow pride and prejudice to keep me from acts of love and deeds of kindness, but may I be worthy of thy trust. Amen.

Know[3.5-15], TaoT[033]

06 August (Day 218 / 147)

O well for him whose will is strong!
He suffers, but he will not suffer long;
He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong;
For him nor moves the loud world's random mock,
Not all Calamity's hugest waves confound,
Who seems a promontory rock,
That compassed round with turbulent sound,
In middle ocean meets the surging shock,
Tempest-buffeted, citadel-crowned.
--Alfred Tennyson.

Grandeur of character lies in force of soul--that is, in the force of thought, moral principle, and love; and this may be found in the humblest condition of life.
--William Ellery Channing.

Eternal God, help me that I may not be deceived by my surroundings as I seek to have life abundantly. Instruct me that it is by the way of character that I must attain the laws of growth, and learn reverence for the spirit of divine life. Amen.

Know[3.5-16], Prov[073]

07 August (Day 219 / 146)

Although a friend may remain faithful in misfortune, yet none but the very best and loftiest will remain faithful to us after our errors and our sins.
--Dean Farrar.

Friendship is like a debt of honor: the moment it is talked of it loses its real name, and assumes the more ungrateful form of obligation. From hence we find that those who regularly undertake to cultivate friendship find ingratitude generally repays their endeavors. --Oliver Goldsmith.

For even in their wickedness shall my prayer continue. --Psalm 141. 5.

Lord God, may I ever continue to be thankful for the times thou hast helped me, when I have asked for thy compassion; may I recall the joy in which I received it, when it may be mine to have compassion and extend a helping hand to others. I pray that I may place my life where it will be stronger than adversity and controlled by sincerity and love. Amen.

Know[3.5-17], Matt[073]

08 August (Day 220 / 145)

Lo! all the glory gone!
God's masterpiece undone!
The last created and the first to fall;
The noblest, frailest, godliest of all.
Child of the humble sod,
Wed with the breath of God,
Descend! for with the lowest thou must lie--
Arise! thou hast inherited the sky.
--John B. Tabb.

Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations; I cannot reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead. --Louisa M. Alcott.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains: from whence shall my help come?
--Psalm 121. 1.

Heavenly Father, may I see as I raise my eyes to the mountains that without the deep shadows there would be no vision of the high-light, and still higher may I see that without the sun there would be no color to encircle the rainbow. May I keep the vision clear. Amen.

Know[3.5-18], TaoT[034]

09 August (Day 221 / 144)

All habits gather, by unseen degrees,
Brooks make rivers, rivers run to seas.
--John Dryden.

Virtue is the foundation of honor and esteem, and the source of all beauty, order and happiness in nature. It is what confers value on all the other endowments and qualities of a reasonable being, to which he ought to be absolutely subservient, and without which the more hideous deformities, and the greater curses they become. --Amos Wilson, the Pennsylvania Hermit

Do not be troubled because you have not great virtues. God made a million spears of grass where he made one tree.... Only have enough of little virtues and common fidelities, and you need not mourn because you are neither a hero nor a saint. --Henry Ward Beecher.

The reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah is riches, and honor, and life.
--Proverbs 22. 4.

Lord God, who keepest truth to generations, forgive me for what I have done that is wrong, and for what I have neglected that was right. Give me strength to find the virtues that are your gifts to me. Amen.

Know[3.5-19], Dham[001], Prov[074]

10 August (Day 222 / 143)

No one can ask honestly or hopefully to be delivered from temptation unless he has himself honestly and firmly determined to do the best he can to keep out of it. --John Ruskin.

Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
--William Shakespeare.

The greatest punishment one can have is to discover, not how hard, but how low he has fallen. --M.B.S.

Almighty God, through thy mercies may I recognize my faults, and correct any evil that is in me. Make me strong, that I may not yield to temptation. May I have regard for thy will and be prepared to take thy messages as they are flashed to the soul. Amen.

Know[3.5-20], ZenT[047], Matt[074]

11 August (Day 223 / 142)

Heaven overreaches you and me,
And all earth's gardens and her graves.
Look up with me, until we see
The day break and the shadows flee.
What though to-night wrecks you and me
If so to-morrow saves?
--Christina G. Rossetti.

The essence of joy lies in the doing rather than in the result of the doing. There is a lifelong and solid satisfaction in any productive labor, manual or mental, which is not pushed beyond the limit of strength.
--Charles W. Eliot.

Show me thy ways, O Jehovah; Teach me thy paths. Guide me in thy truths, and teach me. --Psalm 25. 4, 5.

My Father, keep me where my eyes may look expectantly toward the dawn, through the darkness. Take away everything that comes between me and the brightness of the morning. Amen.

Know[3.5-21], Dham[002], TaoT[035]

12 August (Day 224 / 141)

Our restlessness in this world seems to indicate that we are intended for a better. We have all of us a longing after happiness; and surely the Creator will gratify all the natural desires he has implanted in us. --Robert Southey.

Whenso my quick, light-sandaled feet
Bring me where Joys and Pleasures meet,
I mingle with their throng at will;
They know me not an alien still,
Since neither words nor ways unsweet
Of stored bitterness I spill;
Youth shuns me not nor gladness fears,
For I go softly all my years.
--Edith Thomas.

He hath swallowed up death forever; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces. --Isaiah 25. 8.

Loving Father, help me to guard my inclinations. May I be able to appreciate that though I may be restless from ambition, I also may be restless through discontent. Correct my life, that my desires may meet the true demands of my soul. Strengthen me with the power of calmness, that "I may go softly all my years," even though I walk through the bitterness of sorrow. Amen.

Know[3.5-22], Prov[075]

13 August (Day 225 / 140)

The immortal man is he who has detached himself from the things of time by having ascended into that state of consciousness which is fixed and unvariable, and is not affected by passing events and sensations. Human life consists of an evermoving procession of events, and in this procession the mortal man is immersed, and he is carried along with it; and being so carried along, he has no knowledge of what is behind and before him. The immortal man is he who has stepped out of this procession, and he stands by unmoved and watches it; and from his fixed place he sees both the before, the behind and the middle of the moving thing called life. No longer identifying himself with the sensations and fluctuations of the personality, or with the outward changes which make up the life in time, he has become the passionless spectator of his own destiny and of the destinies of the men and nations.
--James Allen

All the performances of human art, at which we look with praise and wonder, are instances of the resistless force of perseverance.
--Samuel Johnson.

My Lord, I would remember to ask thee this morning for that of which I seem to have most need. May I have the will to keep my patience and realize the untold power of my words and actions. Give me thy peace, not only to rest in, but that I may have it to give to others. Amen.

Know[3.5-23], Matt[075], Dham[003]

14 August (Day 226 / 139)

I count this thing to be grandly true,
That a noble deed is a step toward God;
Lifting the soul from the common clod
To a purer air and a broader view.
We rise by the things that are under our feet,
By what we have mastered of good or gain,
By the pride deposed and the passion slain,
And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet.
--Richard Watson Gilder.

No Apostle of Liberty much to my heart ever found I;
License each for himself, this was at bottom their want.
Liberator of many! first dare to be Servant of many;
What a business is that, would'st thou know it, go try!
--Goethe.

Gracious Father, if I may be beginning this day with an unclean purpose in my heart, help me to clear it away; if I may be trying to avoid some urgent duty, make me ashamed to resist it. Keep away the desires that harm my life, and that withhold the enjoyment of my common work. Amen.

Know[3.5-24], TaoT[036]

15 August (Day 227 / 138)

And do our loves all perish with our frames?
Do those that took their root and put forth buds,
And their soft leaves unfolded in the warmth
Of mutual hearts, grow up and live in beauty,
Then fade and fall, like fair, unconscious flowers?
O, listen, man!
A voice within us speaks the startling word,
'Man, thou shalt never die!'
--Richard Henry Dana.

I am drawing near to the close of my career… and it is a comfort to me to think I have tried to unsettle no man's faith, to corrupt no man's principle, and that I have written nothing which on my deathbed I should wish blotted.
--Sir Walter Scott.

Almighty God, may I have that faith in eternal life which will make me careful of what I choose for myself and share with others. Amen.

Know[3.5-25], Dham[004], Prov[076]

16 August (Day 228 / 137)

The secret of goodness and greatness is in choosing whom you will approach and live with, in memory or imagination, through the crowding obvious people who seem to live with you. --Robert Browning.

Fair Nature's book together read,
The old wood-paths that knew our tread,
The maple shadows overhead--
Where'er I look, where'er I stray,
Thy thought goes with me on my way,
And hence the prayer I breathe to-day.
--John Greenleaf Whittier.

Shall two walk together, except they have agreed? --Amos 3. 3.

Lord God, I thank thee for the delight of congenial companions and the memory of friendship. May I not be quick to lose my friends through misunderstanding and selfishness. May I be considerate and constant and be able to climb to the highest steeps of friendship. Amen.

Know[3.5-26], ZenT[048], Matt[076]

17 August (Day 229 / 136)

You must seek and find God in the heart. --Richter

Is there any other seat of the Divinity than the earth, sea, air, the heavens, and virtuous mind? Why do we seek God elsewhere? He is whatever you see; He is wherever you move. --Lucan

There is a realm where there is neither earth nor water, neither space nor time, neither perception nor thinking, neither light nor darkness, neither east nor west. That is the abode of The Eternal where there is everlasting peace and bliss.
--Sivananda

Nothing is void of God; He Himself fills His work. --Seneca

We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito. --C.S. Lewis

God, I simply ask for awareness of your presence. I do not ask for miracles or signs and wonders. Help me go through each day content in the knowledge that you are with me in each beat of my heart, and present in every breath. Amen.

Know[3.5-27], Dham[005], TaoT[037]

18 August (Day 230 / 135)

Who is the happiest person? He whose nature asks for nothing that the world does not wish and use. --Goethe.

Freely ye received, freely give. --Matthew 10. 8.

Pour out thy love like the rush of a river,
Wasting its waters for ever and ever,
Through the burnt sands that reward not the giver;
Silent or songful thou nearest the sea.
Scatter thy life as the summer showers pouring.
What if no bird through the pearl rain is soaring?
What if no blossom looks upward adoring?
Look to the life that was lavished for thee.
--Unknown.

My Father, I pray that I may have the sympathy that responds with consideration and devotion. May it be a joy for me to give comfort and render service where I may help. Grant that I may not linger too long in happiness and miss thy blessings, but remember that to "travel hopefully is better than to arrive." Amen.

Know[3.5-28], Prov[077]

19 August (Day 231 / 134)

It is written not, "Blessed is he that feedeth the poor," but "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." And you know a little thought and a little kindness are often worth more than a great deal of money. --John Ruskin.

So pity never leaves the gentle breast
Where love has been received a welcome guest;
As wandering saints poor huts have sacred made,
He hallows every heart he once has swayed,
And, when his presence we no longer share,
Still leaves compassion as a relic there.
--Thomas Sheridan.

If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit? --James 2. 16.

Tender Father, help me to consider those who receive the crust of bread at my door; for if it be needed it is asked for by sad and desperate lives. Make me conscious of thy mercy and help, that I may be considerate for the one with the outstretched hand. Amen.

Know[3.5-29], Matt[077], Dham[006]

20 August (Day 232 / 133)

The busy world shoves angrily aside
The man who stands with arms akimbo set
Until occasion tells him what to do;
And he who waits to have his task marked out
Shall die and leave his errand unfulfilled.
--James Russell Lowell.

Awake, arise! the hour is late!
Angels are knocking at thy door!
They are in haste and cannot wait,
And once departed come no more.
--Henry W. Longfellow.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow; For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. --Proverbs 27. 1.

Gracious Father, grant that I may not tarry so long, that when I arrive I will hear, "Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now"; but may I be so persistent with every day that when I arrive I may be ready as well as on time. Amen.

Know[3.5-30], TaoT[038]

21 August (Day 233 / 132)

Let us never be afraid of innocent joy; God is good and what he does is well done; resign yourself to everything, even happiness; ask for the spirit of sacrifice, of detachment, of renunciation, and above all, for the spirit of joy and gratitude. --Amiel.

That's the wise thrush;
He sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
--Robert Browning.

And these things we write, that our joy may be made full. --1 John 1. 4.

Lord God, show me clearly the line which divides right and wrong, that I may not fear the censure of the world. Help me to act with good judgment and be calm in obeying thy laws. Amen.

Know[3.5-31], Dham[007], Prov[078]

22 August (Day 234 / 131)

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how a heather looks
And what a wave must be.
I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.
--Emily Dickinson.

I don't want to possess a faith; I want a faith which will possess me.
--Charles Kingsley.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts.
--Zechariah 4. 6.

My Father, may there be no room in my soul for doubt. Help me to be cautious and careful that my own neglect and carelessness may not cause the loss of my faith. May I be trustful as I look for the great light that guides me over the uncertain way. Amen.

Know[3.5-32], ZenT[049], Matt[078]

23 August (Day 235 / 130)

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.
--W. E. Henley.

A man who has borne himself honorably through a whole life makes an action honorable which might appear ambiguous in others. --Goethe.

Father of mercy, I beseech thee to protect me in my endeavors as I try to live my ideals. May I not choose unnecessary burdens, and when I most need to be strong find that I have lived in that which has weakened my life. I ask for a clear mind and a strong heart that I may be "Captain of my soul." Amen.

Know[3.5-33], Dham[008], TaoT[039]

24 August (Day 236 / 129)

Give me, Lord, eyes to behold the truth;
A seeing sense that knows the eternal right;
A heart with pity filled, and gentlest ruth;
A manly faith that makes all darkness light:
Give me the power to labor for mankind;
Make me the mouth of such as cannot speak;
Eyes let me be to groping men and blind.
--Theodore Parker.

Love's hearts are faithful, but not fond,
Bound for the just, but not beyond;
Not glad, as the low-loving herd,
Of self in other still preferred,
But they have heartily designed
The benefit of broad mankind.
And they serve men austerely,
After their own genius, clearly,
Without a false humility.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men always. --Acts 24. 16.

Heavenly Father, help me to-day to look into my heart and see the truth of my life, and show me thy heart that I may see the truth of life. Amen.

Know[3.5-34], Prov[079]

25 August (Day 237 / 128)

O teach me in the trying hour,
When anguish swells the dewy tear,
To still my sorrows, own thy power,
Thy goodness love, thy justice fear.
Then why, my soul, dost thou complain?
Why drooping seek the dark recess?
Shake off the melancholy chain,
For God created all to bless.
--Thomas Chatterton.

Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows
which show like grief itself, but are not so:
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many shadows.
--William Shakespeare.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God. --Psalm 42. 5.

Loving Father, forbid that I should be lonesome, and forget thou art my friend: and may I not pass over thy mercies while waiting for thy compassion. Help me to find contentment in the inheritances of the earth, where I may always draw from thee. Amen.

Know[3.5-35], Matt[079], Dham[009]

26 August (Day 238 / 127)

Lord, for to-morrow and its needs
I do not pray;
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin
Just for to-day.
Help me to labor earnestly,
And duly pray;
Let me be kind in word and deed,
Father, to-day.
Let me no wrong or idle word
Unthinking say;
Set thou a seal upon my lips
Through all to-day…
--Ernest Wilberforce.

And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? --Matthew 6. 27.

My Lord, I pray that thou wilt control my life, and bless the going out of my work, be it ever so great or small. Help me to realize the necessity of earnestness, that I may work today in the light, and not wait for the night, when it is too dark for work to be done. May I be faithful in my work until it is completed. Amen.

Know[3.5-36], TaoT[040]

27 August (Day 239 / 126)

Who are thy playmates, boy?
"My favorite is joy,
Who brings with him his sister Peace, to stay
The livelong day.
I love them both; but he
Is most to me!"
And where are thy playmates now,
O man of sober brow?
"Alas! dear joy, the merriest is dead,
But I have wed
Peace; and our babe, a boy
Newborn, is joy."
--John B. Tabb.

Depart from evil, and do good; Seek peace, and pursue it. --Psalm 34. 14.

Lord God, may I realize more my dependence on thee for the joys of life. I pray that as I accept thy gifts I will not neglect to take the peace and happiness which thou dost give with them. Grant that I may have the bright hope and cheerful courage that is the experience of humility and truth. Amen.

Know[3.5-37], Dham[010], Prov[080]

28 August (Day 240 / 125)

All truly wise thoughts have been already thought a thousand times; but to make them truly ours we must think them over again honestly, till they take firm root in our personal experience. --Goethe.

The light that fills thy house at morn
Thou canst not for thyself retain;
But all who with thee here are born
It bids to share an equal gain.
The wave, the blue encircling wave,
No chain can bind, no fetter hold;
Its thunders tell of Him who gave
What none can ever buy for gold.
--Jones Very.

And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them.
--John 17. 22.

Father of love, I thank thee for thy daily love and for thy daily bread. May I feel that thy gifts are for all, and not mine to keep and store from those who are in need. Help me as I say, "Thy will be done." Amen.

Know[3.5-38], ZenT[050], Matt[080]

29 August (Day 241 / 124)

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!
--Oliver Wendell Holmes.

We all live in the sublime. Where else can we live? That is the only place of life… Do you imagine that you can possibly be alone, that love can be a thing one knows, a thing one sees; that events can be weighed like the gold and silver of ransom? --Maurice Maeterlinck.

My soul waiteth in silence for God only: from him cometh my salvation.
--Psalm 62. 1.

Loving Father, help me to live, that my spirit may always dwell in thy protecting love. Amen.

Know[3.5-39], Dham[011], TaoT[041]

30 August (Day 242 / 123)

Thyself and thy belongings
Are not thine own so proper as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touched
But to fine issues, nor Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use.
--William Shakespeare.

My Father, I pray that I may not let my life become commonplace through habit. May I not be content to rest in my virtues and let the days pass neglected. Awaken my dull satisfactions to a desire to live for the greatest, that I may have the greatest to live for. Amen.

Know[3.5-40], Prov[081]

31 August (Day 243 / 122)

Let us be patient, and endure a while; the time may come that God may give us a happy release; but let us not be our own murderers.
--John Bunyan.

He that is down need fear no fall;
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.
--John Bunyan.

Time delivers fools from grief and reason wise men. --Epictetus.

My Lord, if I may be walking through fields that are rough with grief and care, may I have the courage to continue on to the smooth pastures, where I may walk with comfort and peace. May I not let the weariness and sorrow that may come to my heart to-day dwarf my hope and enjoyment of the future. Amen.

Know[3.5-41], Matt[081], Dham[012]

The month's end beckons reflection: your thoughts, feelings, and memories. Then, shift your focus to the days ahead, creating new goals and seeking fresh experiences.

01 September (Day 244 / 121)

Spirituality is the journey of discovering the essence of our being, transcending the boundaries of religion and embracing the universal connection that exists within all living beings. It is the recognition that we are more than our physical bodies, and that there is a deeper purpose and meaning to our existence. Spirituality invites us to explore the depths of our souls, to seek truth and wisdom, and to cultivate love, compassion, and inner peace. --Unknown

Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, man cannot live without a spiritual life.
--Buddha

Remember his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. --1 Chronicles 16. 15.

O Lord of wisdom, kindle me with a love for true knowledge, that I may strive, in the moments I have now, to culture my life. Not by might, not by power, but by thy spirit, O Lord, may I learn and teach thy children. Amen.

Review Step 9 this month; Know[3.6-01], TaoT[042]

02 September (Day 245 / 120)

Happiness is through helpfulness. Every morning let us build a booth to shelter someone from life's fierce heat. Every noon let us dig some life-spring for thirsty lips. --Newell Dwight Hillis.

Jehovah is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. --Psalm 145. 18.

And thus we sat in darkness,
Each one busy in his prayer;
"We are lost!" the captain shouted,
As he staggered down the stair.
But the little daughter whispered,
As she took his icy hand,
"Isn't God upon the ocean,
Just the same as on the land?"
--Eugene Field.

Heavenly Father, may I live that my spirit may never feel lost from thee; and when I am in great need of thee, even unto death, may I know that thou art very near. Amen.

Know[3.6-02], Dham[013], Prov[082]

03 September (Day 246 / 119)

Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee:
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry peace,
To silence envious tongues. Be just and fear not:
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's and truth's; then if thou fallest, O Cromwell,
Thou fallest a blessed martyr.
--William Shakespeare.

Surely, the only true knowledge of our fellow man is that which enables us to feel with him, which gives us a fine ear for the heart-pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion. --George Eliot.

May I find within myself consistency of judgment, a compassionate heart, and a deep sense of love for others. May I be guided towards personal growth and transformation, relying less on external influences and placing greater trust in my own inner wisdom. May any shortcomings in this humble prayer be forgiven, and may it be accepted for the sake of all that is sacred. May I have a peaceful night, according to the divine will. Amen.[2]

Know[3.6-03], ZenT[051], Matt[082]

04 September (Day 247 / 118)

I ask not wealth, but power to take
And use the things I have, aright;
Not years, but wisdom that shall make
My life a profit and delight.
--Phoebe Gary.

---

[2] Edited to a non-denominations format from the original prayer by Oliver Cromwell

Another day may bring another mind,
A mind to learn when there is none to teach;
To follow when no leader we can find;
To enjoy when good is now beyond our reach.
A better mind, but not a better time,
A mind to will, but not a time to do
What had been done, if we in life's bright prime,
When God was ready, had been ready too.
--Thomas T. Lynch.

My Father, help me to have lofty thoughts, and may I not be content until they are carried into purpose. Help me to conquer that which will keep me from an act of happiness, and grant that by thinking of that which is pure, and doing that which is good, I may be made helpful and true. Amen.

Know[3.6-04], Dham[014], TaoT[043]

05 September (Day 248 / 117)

Be patient! O, be patient! Put your ear against the earth;
Listen there how noiselessly the germ o' the seed has birth--
How noiselessly and gently it upheaves its little way,
Till it parts the scarcely broken ground, and the blade stands up in day.
Be patient! O, be patient!--though yet our hopes are green,
The harvest fields of freedom shall be crowned with sunny sheen.
Be ripening! be ripening--mature your silent way,
Till the whole broad land is tongued with fire on freedom's harvest day.
--Richard C. Trench.

And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing. --James 1. 4.

Gracious Father, help me to see the truth as thou hast made it, and may I not be indifferent to the beauty and patience of the earth's revelations. May I not mistake indolence for patient ambition, which I would have for anxious hours, and which I need for my heart's desires. Amen.

Know[3.6-05], Prov[083]

06 September (Day 249 / 116)

God will not seek thy race,
Nor will he ask thy birth;
Alone he will demand of thee,
What hast thou done on earth?
--Persian.

One dreams of the time when the interest and capacity of each person shall be studied with reference to the industry about to be undertaken.
--Jane Addams.

Honor is purchased by deeds we do, honor is not won, until some honorable deed is done. --Sir Christopher Marlowe.

Gracious Father, wilt thou bring to my mind and heart the important things which are needed in preparing life. Help me to use the strength that is given to me for to-day, that I may not have to give to-morrow to learning what I should have known. Amen.

Know[3.6-06], Matt[083], Dham[015]

07 September (Day 250 / 115)

Side by side
In the low sunshine by the turban stone
They knelt; each made his brother's woe his own,
Forgetting, in the agony and stress
Of pitying love, his claim of selfishness;
Peace, for his friend besought, his own became;
His prayers were answered in another's name;
And when at last they rose up to embrace,
Each saw God's pardon in his brother's face.
--John G. Whittier.

My care is like my shadow in the sun,
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it;
Stands and lies by me, does what I have done,
This too familiar care does make me rue it.
No means I find to rid him from my breast,
Till by the end of things it be suppressed.
--Queen Elizabeth.

Lord God, help me to look for those who are in need of help. Forgive me for my failures, and may I gather up my broken promises and try to redeem them. I ask for thy forgiveness, as I ask that thou wilt help me to forgive them who may have trespassed against me. Amen.

Know[3.6-07], TaoT[044]

08 September (Day 251 / 114)

All service ranks the same with God,
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we: there is no last nor first.
--Robert Browning.

Thou needest not man's little life of years,
Save that he gather wisdom from them all;
That in thy fear he lose all other fears,
And in thy calling heed no other call.
Then shall he be thy child to know thy care,
And in thy Self the eternal Sabbath share.
--Jones Very.

He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul; But he that is careless of his ways shall die. --Proverbs 19.16.

My Lord, forbid that I should want to live to be known only for power and pride. Help me to strive for that which is helpful and lovely. May I never be restrained from thee, but delight to follow in thy way. Help me to be obedient to thy laws, that I may learn thy truths. Amen.

Know[3.6-08], Dham[016], Prov[084]

09 September (Day 252 / 113)

Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit, nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe.
--Robert Browning.

Life without industry is guilt; and industry without art is brutality.
--John Ruskin.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life. --James 1. 12.

Almighty God, help me as I start this day to remember how easy it is to drive the peace from it. May I do my best to keep it, and defy any indolence or disposition, that may make me spoil it. May I lay me down at night in peace and sleep because of the contentment that has filled the hours. Amen.

Know[3.6-09], ZenT[052], Matt[084]

10 September (Day 253 / 112)

Let the wind blow east, west, north, or south, the immortal soul will take its flight to the destined point. --Thomas Sheridan.

He is void of true taste who strives to have his house admired by decorating it with showish outside; but to adorn our character by gentleness of a communicative temper is a proof of good taste and good nature. --Epictetus.

Let fortune empty her whole quiver on me.
I have a soul that, like an empty shield,
Can take it all, and verge enough for more.
--Thomas Dryden.

Almighty God, I bless thee that it is thou who brought me to live on earth; and I rejoice that it is thou who wilt judge my life when thou takest me away. May I be saving thy rich gifts that I may not be found poor. May I be diligent in worthy endeavors to do my best for thee. Amen.

Know[3.6-10], Dham[017], TaoT[045]

11 September (Day 254 / 111)

But what is virtue but repose of mind,
A pure ethereal calm, that knows no storm;
Above the reach of wild ambitious wind,
Above the passions that this world deform.
--James Thomson.

And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, "Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty!"
Yes, as my swift days near their goal,
'Tis all that I implore;
In life and death, a chainless soul
With courage to endure.
--Emily Brontë.

Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward.
--Hebrews 10. 35.

Tender Father, may I pause this morning to look at that which I keep uppermost in my life; and if it may not be worthy of thy esteem, may I be bold enough to revise my ideals. With thy compassion may I free my heart and mind of all unworthiness, and be given endurance to restore the empty places. Amen.

Know[3.6-11], Prov[085]

12 September (Day 255 / 110)

Our duty is to be useful, not according to our desires, but according to our powers. --Amiel.

How good is man's life, the mere living! How fit to employ all the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy! --Robert Browning.

Do something! No man is born with a mortgage on his soul; but every man is born a debtor to Time. Meet this obligation before you find too late that your life is impoverished and you cannot redeem it. --M.B.S.

My Father, what I have left out of my life I know I cannot recover now. I pray that I may give the best to what is left. Make me deliberate, that I may prove my earnestness. Make me industrious, that I may use my best resources to develop my life and further thy kingdom. Amen.

Know[3.6-12], Matt[085], Dham[018]

13 September (Day 256 / 109)

The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer…
I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees.
--Brother Lawrence

And thou, O river of to-morrow, flowing
Between thy narrow adamantine walls,
But beautiful, and white with waterfalls
And wreaths of mist, like hands the pathway showing;
I hear the trumpets of the morning blowing.
It is the mystery of the unknown
That fascinates us; we are children still,
Wayward and wistful; with one hand we cling
To the familiar things we call our own,
And with the other, resolute of will,
Grope in the dark for what the day will bring.
--Henry W. Longfellow.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth. --Job 5. 17.

Almighty God, I pray that thou wilt help me to correct my life to-day that I may know a better way to-morrow; and may I be mindful and try to do right. Grant that I may be patient and kind if I may be sick or in need, and always keep uppermost the faith of deliverance and eternal care. Amen.

Know[3.6-13], TaoT[046]

14 September (Day 257 / 108)

Since it is Providence that determines the fates of men, their inner nature is thus brought into unison. There is such harmony, as in all things of nature, that one might explain the whole without referring to a higher Providence. But this only proves the more clearly and certainly this higher Providence, which has given existence to this harmony. --Wilhelm von Humboldt.

The good mariner, when he draws near the port, furls his sails and enters it softly; so ought we to lower the sails of our worldly operations, and turn to God with all heart and understanding. --Dante.

Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God; Thy judgments are a great deep: O Jehovah, thou preservest man and beast. --Psalm 36. 6.

My Father in heaven, may I hear thy voice to-day! May I be quiet as I listen to thee. Above the clamor of the crowd may I hear thee calling me. May I hear thee in my joys and in my sorrows; in my work and in my leisure. May I listen to thee oftener, that I may be familiar with thy ways. Amen.

Know[3.6-14], Dham[019], Prov[086]

15 September (Day 258 / 107)

Friendship is one of the cheapest and most accessible of pleasures; it requires no outlay and no very serious expenditure of time or trouble. It is quite easy to make friends, if one wants to... There is surely no greater pleasure in the world than to feel one is needed, welcomed, missed, and loved.
--Arthur C. Benson.

Friendship is love without his wings. --William H. Taft (from Byron).

Without sympathy, in the highest sense of intellectual penetration, kindness may be a folly, and intended aid, oppression. --John Ruskin.

He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. --Proverbs 18. 24.

My Father, may I know the delight of true friendship which is responsive and sincere. May I never feel so secure in myself that I will cease to want friends, or be so dependent on others that I will be continually seeking them. May I understand the value of having a stanch friend and of being one. Amen.

Know[3.6-15], ZenT[053], Matt[086]

16 September (Day 259 / 106)

Yes, to this thought I hold with firm persistence--
The last result of wisdom stamps it true:
He only earns his freedom and existence
Who daily conquers them anew.
--Goethe.

For thee hath been dawning
Another blue day;
Look how thou let it
Slip empty away.
--Goethe.

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
Who can call to-day his own:
He who, secure within, can say,
'To-morrow, do thy worst, for I have lived to-day.'
--John Dryden.

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee.
--Isaiah 60. 1.

Gracious Father, help me to be alert this morning and select the noblest that is in to-day. May I be diligent and not find in the evening that I have been unworthy of the day. Amen.

Know[3.6-16], Dham[020], TaoT[047]

17 September (Day 260 / 105)

In the hour of distress and misery the eye of every mortal turns to friendship; in the hour of gladness and conviviality, what is your want? It is friendship. When the heart overflows with gratitude or with other sweet and sacred sentiment, what is the word to which it would give utterance? A friend.
--Walter Savage Landor.

The hurried quest of some people to get hold of new friends is so perpetual that they never have time to get acquainted with anyone. --M.B.S.

Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; And go not to thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: Better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off. --Proverbs 27. 10.

My Lord and my Friend, I pray that my sympathy may be sincere and comforting, and with a glad heart I may bring rejoicing to my friends. May I learn from thee how I may be a permanent friend. Amen.

Know[3.6-17], Prov[087]

18 September (Day 261 / 104)

There is no greater happiness than to be able to look on a life usefully and virtuously employed: to trace our own purposes in existence by such tokens that excite neither shame nor sorrow. --Dr. Johnson.

The perfect poise that comes-from self-control,
The poetry of action, rhythmic, sweet--
The unvexed music of the body and soul
That the Greeks dreamed of, made at last complete.
Our stumbling lives attain not such a bliss;
Too often, while the air we vainly beat,
Love's perfect law of liberty we miss.
--Annie Matheson.

Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day.
--Acts 23. 1.

Heavenly Father, may I not confuse my life with rebellion, but through thy guidance find peace. Help me through the perplexities that may keep me from the quietness of to-day. Keep me in sight of the great plan of life, that I may grow steadfastly toward thee. Amen.

Know[3.6-18], Matt[087], Dham[021]

19 September (Day 262 / 103)

Be not afraid to pray--to pray is right.
Pray if thou canst, with hope; but ever pray
Though hope be weak, or sick with long delay;
Pray in the darkness, if there be no light.
Far is the time, remote from human sight,
When war and discord on earth shall cease:
Yet every prayer for universal peace
Avails the time to expedite.
--Hartley Coleridge.

Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. --Mahatma Gandhi

More things are wrought by prayer
Than the world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
--Alfred Tennyson.

O Lord, give me the desire to pray, and teach me how to pray. Sustain me, that I may overcome my weaknesses, and strengthen me, that I may have thine approval. May I be reverent and unselfish as I come to thee in prayer. Amen.

Know[3.6-19], ZenT[054], TaoT[048]

20 September (Day 263 / 102)

For not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent's love. --Charles Dickens

Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. --Isaiah 41

Fret not thyself. --Proverbs 24.19

Be like the bird, that, pausing in her flight a while on boughs too slight,
Feels them give way beneath her, and yet sings, knowing that she hath wings.
--Victor Hugo.

Trust in Jehovah, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on his faithfulness.
--Psalm 37. 3.

There is no 'please', there is only 'thank you'. --TA

If I cannot find Paradise in this short life, then I will bend my will, my habits, and my thoughts, until, made new, Paradise and I are one. --TA

Eternal God, help me to realize that whether I live in love and obedience, or wait in neglect and indifference, that I can never separate myself from thee. May I be worthy to receive thine inheritance and hear thee say, "Well done." Amen.

Know[3.6-20], Dham[022], Prov[088]

21 September (Day 264 / 101)

It is the secret sympathy,
The silver link, the silken tie,
Which heart to heart and mind to mind
In body and in soul can bind.
--Sir Walter Scott.

No action, whether foul or fair,
Is ever done, but it carves somewhere
A record, written by fingers ghostly,
As a blessing or a curse, and mostly
In the greater weakness or greater strength
Of the acts which follow it.
--Henry W. Longfellow.

And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outermost part of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.
--Judges 7. 17.

Loving Father, may I remember that from the beginning, all things were created beautiful and were given for love. I pray that I may be willing to be guided to the beautiful things of life and receive from them the delight of thy love. Amen.

Know[3.6-21], Matt[088]

22 September (Day 265 / 100)

Man learns to swim by being tossed into life's maelstrom and left to make his way ashore. No youth can learn to sail his life-craft in a lake sequestered and sheltered from all the storms, where other vessels never come. Skill comes through sailing one's craft amidst rocks and bars and opposing fleets, amidst storms and whirls and counter currents.
--Newell Dwight Hillis.

O, a trouble's a ton or a trouble's an ounce,
Or a trouble is what you make it!
And it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts,
But only--how did you take it?
--Edmund C. Vance.

And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise.
--Hebrews 6. 15.

Tender Father, may I not encourage the disposition to enlarge and make much of the troubles and disappointments of life, and make light of the joys and privileges. I pray that I may keep a large place for happiness. Amen.

Know[3.6-22], Dham[023], TaoT[049]

23 September (Day 266 / 99)

When over the fair fame of friend or foe
The shadow of disgrace shall fall; instead
Of words to blame, or reproof of thus and so,
Let something good be said.
Forget not that no fellow-being yet
May fall so low but love may lift his head;
Even the cheek of shame with tears is wet
If something good be said.

--Author unknown.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
--Robert Frost, "The Road Less Traveled"

Lord God, grant that after years of climbing I may not find the mist in my soul has dulled the vision of thy glory. Keep me from the habit of looking for faults, and missing the virtues in others. Forbid that I should be so occupied in taking measure of other lives that I neglect to measure my own. Amen.

Know[3.6-23], ZenT[055], Prov[089]

24 September (Day 267 / 98)

Get the truth once uttered, and 'tis like
A star newborn that drops into its place,
And which, once circling in its placid round,
Not all the tumult of the earth can shake.
--James Russell Lowell.

If you would be well spoken of, learn to speak well of others. And when you have learned to speak well of them, endeavor likewise to do well to them; and reap the fruit of being well spoken of by them. --Epictetus.

He that slandereth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his friend, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor; he that doeth these things shall never be moved. --Psalm 15. 3, 5.

Lord God, I bless thee for the lives of men and women who are willing to be led by the truth, and who are worthy to follow thee. I pray that thou wilt make me truthful, and keep me steadfast, that none may go astray by the uncertainty of my way. Amen.

Know[3.6-24], Matt[089], Dham[024]

25 September (Day 268 / 97)

When you do anything from a clear judgment that it ought to be done, never shrink from being seen to do it, even though the world should misunderstand it; for if you are not acting rightly, shun the action itself; if you are, why fear those who wrongly censure you? --Epictetus

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid. --Micah 4. 4.

We wish to learn philosophy by rote, and play at heroism. But the wiser God says… Try the rough water as well as the smooth. Rough water can teach lessons worth knowing. When the state is unquiet, personal qualities are more than ever decisive. Fear not a revolution which will constrain you to live five years in one. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Eternal God, may I learn to pray from my heart, not for my desires but to know your will for me. Help me to make good decisions and have the courage to do what is right. Amen.

Know[3.6-25], TaoT[050]

26 September (Day 269 / 96)

God is never so far off as even to be near-- He is within: Our spirit is the home he holds most dear. To think of him as by our side is almost as untrue as to remove his throne beyond the starry blue. --F.W. Faber.

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.
--William Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up"

Oasis in a wasteland,
marcelle waves whisper sure,
a star guiding,
steady, steadfast, and pure.
--Anonymous

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live. --Job 27. 6.

My Father, may I consider the place in which I stand: and may I not be deceived in thinking I am near thee while I am living far away. Teach me the way to draw nearer to thee each day, until my spirit may continually dwell with thee. Amen.

Know[3.6-26], Dham[025], Prov[090]

27 September (Day 270 / 95)

The man who has no refuge in himself, who lives, so to speak, in his front rooms, in the outer whirlwind of things and opinions, is not properly a personality at all; ... he is one of a crowd. --Amiel.

Happy the heart that keeps its twilight hour, and in the depths of heavenly peace reclined, loves to commune with thoughts of tender power-- thoughts that ascend, like angels beautiful. --Paul Hamilton Hayne.

The art of meditation may be exercised at all hours and in all places; and men of genius in their walks, at table, and amidst assemblies, turning the eye of the mind inward, can form an artificial solitude; retired amidst a crowd, calm amidst distractions, and wise amidst folly. --Disraeli.

Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. --Psalm 4. 4.

Heavenly Father, save me from being so filled with regret and self-pity, that I will have to be sustained by the bright spirits of others. May I be continually refreshed by the spirit of life that may be found at all times. Amen.

Know[3.6-27], Matt[090]

28 September (Day 271 / 94)

Unless there is a predominating and overmastering purpose to which all the accessories and incidents of life contribute, the character will be weak, irresolute, uncertain. --Frances E. Willard.

Life is not an idle ore,
But iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom
To shape and use.
--Alfred Tennyson.

He that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed.... A double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. --James 1. 6, 8.

O God, help me to be positive. May I not want to be in so many places, and in so many things, that I can never be found in anything. Help me to know that a purpose secured is worth many attempts, and that to have a character I must build it. Amen.

Know[3.6-28], Dham[026], TaoT[051]

29 September (Day 272 / 93)

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

--Matthew 10. 29, 30.
O strange and wild is the world of men
Which the eyes of the Lord must see--
With continents, inlands, tribes, and tongues,
With multitudes bond and free!
All kings of the earth bow down to him,
And yet--he can think of me.
For none can measure the mind of God
Or the bounds of eternity,
He knows each life that has come from him,
To the tiniest bird and bee,
For the love of his heart is so deep and wide
That it takes in even me.
--Mary E. Allbright.

Almighty God, cause me to look out this morning, and open wide my eyes, that I may see what great preparation thou hast made that I might live. May I be ashamed to start wrong and be unworthy of the glory of this day. Amen.

Know[3.6-29], ZenT[056], Prov[091]

30 September (Day 273 / 92)

Up, up, my soul, the long-spent time redeeming;
Sow thou the seeds of better deeds and thought;
Light other lamps while yet thy lamp is beaming--
The time is short.
Think of the good thou might'st have done when brightly
The suns to thee life's choicest season brought;
Hours lost to God in pleasure passing lightly--
The time is short.
If thou hast friends, give them thy best endeavor,
Thy warmest impulse, and thy purest thought,
Keeping in mind and words and action ever--
The time is short.
--Elizabeth Prentiss.

What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. --James 4. 14.

Loving Father, help me to realize that I am not living in the right way nor the right place if I am discontented, or happy in trifles and untruth. Help me to find my place, and with thy help may I stand firm and confident. Amen.

Know[3.6-30], Matt[091], Dham[027]

Take a moment to reflect on the highs and lows, triumphs and trials, and then turn the page with intention. Ansticipate the coming month for new aspirations, exciting plans, and a fresh perspective. Your journey unfolds with each passing day. Fill it with purpose and enthusiasm.

01 October (Day 274 / 91)

He who is false to present duty breaks a thread in the loom, and will find the flaw when he may have forgotten the cause. --Henry Ward Beecher.
He speaks not well who doth his time deplore,
Naming it new and a little obscure,
Ignoble and unfit for lofty deeds.
All times were modern in the time of them,
And this no more than others. Do thy part
Here in the living day, as did the great
Who made old days immortal.
--Richard Watson Gilder.

For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And master the devil, or throw him out
With wondrous potency.
--William Shakespeare.

And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. --Daniel 6. 10.

Heavenly Father, help me to get away from doubt that leads to despair. Give me a vision of hope that is stayed on faith. May I be conscious and appreciative of my privileges while they come to me and make them immortal. Amen.

Review Step 10 this month; Know[3.6-31], TaoT[052]

02 October (Day 275 / 90)

I am not earth-born, though I here delay;
Hope's child, I summon infiniter powers,
And laugh to see the mild sunny day
Smile on the shrunk and thin autumnal hours;
I laugh, for hope hath a happy place for me--
If my bark sinks, 'tis to another sea.
--William E. Channing.

He who has a why to live can bear almost any how. --Nietzsche

The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
Grow dim with age, and Nature sink in years;
But thou shall flourish in immortal youth,
Unhurt amidst the war of elements,
The wreck of matter and the crush of worlds.
--Thomas Addison.

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.
--Psalm 36. 9.

My Father, I would pray that my sense of gloom may not be more than thy grace. May the glorious light of thy love break through my disheartened soul, and reveal the sincerity of thy promises, that I may be happy in thy care. Amen.

Know[3.6-32], Dham[028], Prov[092]

03 October (Day 276 / 89)

Come hither, lads, and harken,
For a tale there is to tell
Of the wonderful days a-coming,
When all shall be better than well.
Come, then, let us cast off fooling,
And put by ease and rest,
For the cause alone is worthy
Till the good days bring the best.
--William Morris.

Man's life is but a working day
Whose tasks are set aright;
A time to work, a time to pray,
And then a quiet night.
And then, please God, a quiet night
Where palms are green and robes are white;
A long-drawn breath, a balm for sorrow,
And all things lovely on the morrow.
--Christina G. Rossetti.

And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. --Isaiah 61. 11.

Heavenly Father, help me to see that before the night thou hadst planned the morning, and that thou hast never sent the night without the hope of the morning. Before I rest in the night may I be ready for the morning. Amen.

Know[3.6-33], Matt[092]

04 October (Day 277 / 88)

We ought to rise day by day with a certain zest, a clear intention, a design to make the most of every hour; not to let the busy hours shoulder each other or tread on each other's heels, but to force every action to give up its strength and sweetness. There is work to be done, and there are empty hours to be filled as well.... But, most of all, there must be something to quicken, enliven, practice the soul. --Arthur C. Benson.

Men's souls ought to be left to see clearly; not jaundiced, blinded, twisted all awry, by revenge, moral abhorrence, and the like. --Thomas Carlyle.

But there is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding. --Job 32. 8.

Spirit of life, I pray that thou wilt continually live within me. May my days be spent neither in waste nor idleness, but planned to use, with the best that is given me. Amen.

Dham[029], TaoT[053]

05 October (Day 278 / 87)

Earth gets its price for what earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
The priest has his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;
At the devil's booth are all things sold,
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking;
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking.
--James Russell Lowell.

The best things in life are free. --Proverb

Gracious Father, may the world speak to me of thy gifts, and of the peace and power which it freely offers. May I not pass by thy great appeals, and prefer to purchase at a great cost my indolence and dissipation. Amen.

Know[3.6-34], ZenT[057], Prov[093]

06 October (Day 279 / 86)

The heart which boldly faces death
Upon the battlefield, and dares
Cannon and bayonet, faints beneath
The needle-points of frets and cares.
The stoutest spirits they dismay--
The tiny stings of every day.
Ah! more than martyr's aureole
And more than hero's heart of fire,
We need the humble strength of soul
Which daily toils and ills require.
Sweet patience, grant us, if you may
An added grace for every day.
--Adelaide A. Procter.

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.
--Alfred Tennyson.

To escape from the world means that one's mind is not concerned with the opinions of the world. --Dōgen

My Father, I pray that I may not be dismayed over life, and its trifles. Help me to master difficulties great and small, and give me patience through all until I reach the untroubled way. Amen.

Know[3.7-01], Matt[093], Dham[030]

07 October (Day 280 / 85)

Yet in opinions look not always back;
Your wake is nothing, mind the coming track;
Leave what you've done for what you have to do;
Don't be "consistent," but be simply true.
--Oliver Wendell Holmes.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has nothing to do. --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. --Exodus 14. 15.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may not be so consistent in the small things of life that I will lose the great inspirations that come to the soul. Broaden my life, that I may have the freedom of heart and mind to pass over the failures and interruptions, and with vigorous energy continue in the progress of life. Amen.

Know[3.7-02], TaoT[054]

08 October (Day 281 / 84)

Man is made or unmade by himself… By the right choice and true application of thought man ascends to the Divine Perfection; by the abuse and wrong application of thought he descends below the level of the beast. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character… --James Allen

He is brave whose tongue is silent
Of the trophies of his word.
He is great whose quiet bearing
Marks his greatness well assured.
--Edwin Arnold.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men." --Luke 18. 11.

Lord God, thou knowest what I am and where I belong. Have mercy upon me and strengthen me, that I may not through weakness stay in the darkness. Lead me out into the light; and may I find my way and be contented with it. Amen.

Know[3.7-03], Dham[031], Prov[094]

09 October (Day 282 / 83)

I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea
Come drifting home with broken masts and sails;
I shall believe the Hand which never fails
From seeming evil worketh good for me;
And though I weep because those sails are battered,
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered,

'I trust in Thee.'
--Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Cease every joy to glimmer on my mind.
But leave, O leave the light of hope behind.
--Thomas Campbell.

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; But when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. --Proverbs 13. 12.

Loving Father, help me to pass by my discouragements of yesterday and look into the hope of to-day. Make me more careful of my strength, and less forgetful of thy promises and of my trust. Amen.

Know[3.7-04], ZenT[058], Matt[094]

10 October (Day 283 / 82)

We cannot make bargains for blisses,
Nor catch them like fishes in nets;
And sometimes the thing our life misses
Helps more than the thing which it gets.
For good lieth not in pursuing,
Nor gaining of great nor small,
But just in the doing and doing
As we would be done by is all.
--Alice Gary.

True, it is most painful not to meet the kindness and affection you feel you have deserved, and have a right to expect from others; but it is a mistake to complain, for it is no use; you cannot extort friendship… --Sydney Smith.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. --Matthew 22. 39.

Lord God, help me to understand that true affection is not that which as it gives feels it merits return. May I avoid being selfish and stubborn; and with my affections give peace and joy. Amen.

Know[3.7-05], Dham[032], TaoT[055]

11 October (Day 284 / 81)

The man who melts with social sympathy though not allied, is than a thousand kinsmen, of more worth. --Euripides.

Ask God to give thee skill
In comfort's art,
That thou may'st consecrated be
And set apart,
Unto a life of sympathy;
For heavy is the weight of ill
In every heart;
And comforters are needed much

Of Christlike touch.
--Alexander Hamilton.

Heavenly Father, thou hast made sympathy divine. May I never make it commonplace. Grant that as thou dost bless and comfort me I may be willing to comfort others, and do whatsoever thou wouldst have me do. Amen.

Know[3.7-06], Prov[095]

12 October (Day 285 / 80)

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity. --Henry Van Dyke

You may delay, but time will not. --Benjamin Franklin

An illusion haunts us, that a long duration, as a year, a decade, a century, is valuable. But an old French sentence says, "God works in moments." We ask for long life, but 'tis deep life or grand moments that signify. Let the measure of Time be spiritual, not mechanical. Life is unnecessarily long. Moments of insight, of fine personal relation, a smile, a glance--what ample borrowers of eternity they are! --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. --2 Peter 3. 8.

My Father, I pray that when the sun sets today my hope may not set with it. Be with me before the dawn, that I may plan with thee a new day. I pray that thou wilt release me from anything that keeps me from reaching the highest. Amen.

Know[3.7-07], Matt[095], Dham[033]

13 October (Day 286 / 79)

What stronger breast-plate than a heart untainted! Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just, and he but naked, though locked up in steel, whose conscience with injustice is corrupted. --William Shakespeare.

A man's accusations of himself are always believed, his praises never.
--Montaigne.

Justice needs that two be heard. --From Goethe's Autobiography.

That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live.
--Deuteronomy 16. 20.

Lord of justice, if I may be influenced this morning by doubt and am inclined to be resentful, wilt thou cause me to have a generous spirit and keep my faith. May I never descend to anything base or deceitful, but may I remember that if I lay down my life, I may have the power to take it up again. Amen.

Know[3.7-08], ZenT[059], TaoT[056]

14 October (Day 287 / 78)

Do good with what thou hast, or it will do thee no good. If thou wouldst be happy, bring thy mind to thy condition, and have an indifferency for more than what is sufficient. --William Penn.

See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they? Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. --Matthew 6:26-29

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honor. --Psalm 8. 4, 5.

Eternal God, may I know the value of the gift of life. May I think seriously of it, and not through abuse or neglect cripple it, remembering that it is mine to sow, to grow, and to reap. I pray that I may care more for the food and raiment of my soul than I care for the food and raiment of my body. Amen.

Know[3.7-09], Dham[034], Prov[096]

15 October (Day 288 / 77)

Being not unacquainted with woe, I learned to help the unfortunate.
--Virgil.

There are some hearts like wells green-mossed and deep
As ever summer saw,
And cool their water is, yea, cool and sweet;
But you must come to draw.
They hoard not, yet they rest in calm content,
And not unsought will give;
They can be quiet with their wealth unspent,
So self-contained they live.
--Author unknown.

Gracious Father, help me to understand that while I may be content to rest with what I have gathered, I cannot preserve the strength of my soul unless I share my possessions. Give me a passion for humanity that will advance gifts through love, and offer service without the need of an appeal. Amen.

Know[3.7-10], Matt[096]

16 October (Day 289 / 76)

As ships meet at sea--a moment together, when words of greeting must be spoken, and then away upon the deep--so men meet in this world; and I think we should cross no man's path without hailing him, and if he needs, giving him supplies. --Henry Ward Beecher.

Nothing is more unaccountable than the spell that often lurks in a spoken word. A thought may be present to the mind, and two minds conscious of the same thought, but as long as it remains unspoken their familiar talk flows quietly over the hidden idea. --Nathaniel Hawthorne.

And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?
--Matthew 5. 47.

Heavenly Father, I pray that thou wilt give me a generous heart. May I not lose sight of the truth, that thou hast made others to have the same needs and wants that I may have. May I be self-forgetful in service. Amen.

Know[3.7-11], Dham[035], TaoT[057]

17 October (Day 290 / 75)

Good name, in man or woman, dear my Lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls;
Who steals my purse, steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.
--William Shakespeare.

Keep back your tears when a soul is untrue;
'Sorrow is shallow'; and one can wade through
The mud and the marshes, and still endure
If he finds he has kept his spirit pure.
The rose near died when it fell to its lot
To break its heart for forget-me-not;
But after its heart was healed by the dew,
Right by its side a sweet violet grew!
--M.B.S.

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold. --Proverbs 22. 1.

My Father, teach me the value of the possessions that can neither be handled nor seen; and may I not take them away from others. Help me keep thy commandment "Thou shalt not steal," in all its relations to life. Amen.

Know[3.7-12], ZenT[060], Prov[097]

18 October (Day 291 / 74)

Yet I argue not against heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot of heart of hope; but still bear up and steer right onward. --John Milton.

Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year. No man has learned anything rightly until he knows that every day is doomsday.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson.

He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.
--John Keats.

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee. --Psalm 32. 8.

My Father, if I may be living in bad habits, help me to get out of them. If I may be neglectful of good deeds, help me to get at them. May I reach for the highest purposes as I search for the realities, and may I not delay, but start to-day. Amen.

Know[3.7-13], Matt[097], Dham[036]

19 October (Day 292 / 73)

Don't look too hard except for something agreeable; we can find all the disagreeable things we want, between our own hats and boots.
--Leigh Hunt.

Instead of a gem or a flower, cast the gift of a lovely thought into the heart of a friend. --George Macdonald.

For the want of common discretion the very end of good breeding is wholly perverted; and civility, intended to make us easy, is employed in laying chains and fetters upon us, in debarring our wishes, and in crossing our most reasonable desires and inclinations. --Jonathan Swift.

My Lord, help me to adjust my life to what I choose to be, rather than be content in what I am. May I not spend my time in dreaming of obstacles, or searching for things that hurt, but may I be gentle and kind, and as I see the truth speak for it and follow it. Amen.

Know[3.7-14], TaoT[058]

20 October (Day 293 / 72)

There has always seemed to me something impious in the neglect of health. I could not do half the good I do if it were not for the strength and activity some consider coarse and degrading. --Charles Kingsley.

I will be lord over myself. --Goethe.

To keep well drink often, but water;
Eat not that which makes life shorter;
But first, with all your might and skill,
Just chain your habits to your will.
--M.B.S.

A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings, and learn how by his own thought to derive benefit from his illnesses. --Hippocrates

Lord God, may I not wait until I am afflicted and cannot use them to thank thee for my blessings. Guard me against infirmities that are brought on through indulgences, and help me to control my life. May I never forget that regret will not retrieve the life that is spent, even if it brings forgiveness and hope for the days to come. Amen.

Know[3.7-15], Dham[037], Prov[098]

21 October (Day 294 / 71)

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.
--Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

We thank thee, O Father, for all that is bright--
The gleam of the day and the stars of the night,
The flowers of our youth and the fruits of our prime,
And the blessings that march down the pathway of time.
--Will Carleton.

Thanklessness is a parching wind, drying up the fountain of pity, the dew of mercy, the streams of grace. For doth not that rightly seem to be lost which is given to one ungrateful? --Saint Bernard.

O give thanks unto Jehovah; for he is good; for his lovingkindness endureth for ever. --Psalm 136. 1.

My Father, help me to understand that I cannot have self-development unless the spirit of truth drills my character. Cleanse my heart from all impurity, and strengthen me for all usefulness: help me to daily live this prayer. Amen.

Know[3.7-16], ZenT[061], Matt[098]

22 October (Day 295 / 70)

O youth whose hope is high,
Who doth to truth aspire,
Whether thou live or die,
O look not back nor tire.
Thou that art bold to fly
Through tempest, flood and fire,
Nor dost not shrink to try
Thy heart in torments dire--
If thou canst Death defy,
If thy faith is entire,
Press onward, for thine eye
Shall see thy heart's desire.

--Robert Bridges.

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.
--John 10. 28.

My Father, I pray that I may be more generous with my smiles and gladness, and more saving with my tears and sadness. Amen.

Know[3.7-17], Dham[038], TaoT[059]

23 October (Day 296 / 69)

O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.
This is life to come,
Which martyred men have made more glorious
For us to strive to follow. May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense!
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world.
--George Eliot.

Doubt indulged becomes doubt realized. To determine to do anything is half the battle. Courage is victory, timidity is defeat. --Nelson.

And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions.
--Ezekiel 2. 6.

Gracious Father, try me again by the courage I have to-day, if thou art judging me by the fear I held yesterday. Help me to see that wavering is misleading and temperament is deceptive. May I learn self-control. Amen.

Know[3.7-18], Prov[099]

24 October (Day 297 / 68)

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –

And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –
--Emily Dickinson

Exceeding peace made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?" The vision raised its head,
And, with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."
The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again, with a great awakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed--
And, lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!
--Leigh Hunt.

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things.
--Jeremiah 33. 3.

Lord God, may I keep within my heart that secret sympathy that adds to the power of life. Help me to seek the things that are real, and not be deceived by the things which only appear to be. May all with whom I have to do feel the better for my companionship. Amen.

Know[3.7-19], Matt[099], Dham[039]

25 October (Day 298 / 67)

Wav'ring as winds the breath of fortune blows,
No power can turn it, and no prayers compose.
Deep in some hermit's solitary cell,
Repose, and ease, and contemplation dwell.
Let conscience guide thee in the days of need,
Judge well thy own, and then thy neighbor's deed.
--Geoffrey Chaucer.

To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late;
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods.
--Thomas B. Macaulay.

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. --Matthew 20. 28.

Heavenly Father, help me to remember that I am to cover life's journey, even though I may go the way carelessly and aimlessly. May I make an estimate of what I am losing, by waiting so long at the resting places, "For the road winds up hill all the way to the end, and the journey takes the whole day long, from morn to night." Amen.

Know[3.7-20], ZenT[062], TaoT[060]

26 October (Day 299 / 66)

When you seek it, you cannot find it. --Zen Proverb

The trouble is, you think you have time. --Buddha

Be as a flower; content to be, to grow in sweetness day by day. If thou would'st perfect thyself in knowledge, perfect thyself in Love. If thou would'st reach the Highest, ceaselessly cultivate a loving and compassionate heart. To him who chooses Goodness, sacrificing all, is given that which is more than, and includes, all. --James Allen

O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.
--Matthew 15. 28.

Lord and Master of all, I pray that thou wilt make me see through my prejudices and beyond my desires to the very "top of my condition." May I not wait for places or circumstances that are dimly in the distance or that are near at hand, but accomplish the work I should do to-day. Amen.

Know[3.7-21], Prov[100]

27 October (Day 300 / 65)

The vice of envy is not only a dangerous, but a mean vice; for it is always a confession of inferiority. It may promote conduct which will be fruitful of wrong to others, and it must cause misery to the man who feels it.
--Theodore Roosevelt.

Of all the passions, jealousy is that which exacts the hardest service, and pays the bitterest wages. Its service is to watch the success of one's enemy; its wages to be sure of it. --C.C. Colton.

Dear is my friend–yet from my foe, as from my friend, comes good: My friend shows what I can do, and my foe what I should. --Schiller.

Almighty God, I would ask thee that my days be filled with aspiration, and that my heart may know no envy. Help me to love humanity. May I be so glad of the success of others that I may never know what it is to be envious. Amen.

Know[3.7-22], Dham[040]

28 October (Day 301 / 64)

It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Jehovah.
--Lamentations 3. 26.

Cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words, and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inward to illuminate yourself. --Dogen

Not so in haste, my heart!
Have faith in God and wait;
Although he linger long,
He never comes too late.
Until he cometh, rest,
Nor grudge the hours that roll;
The feet that wait for God
Are soonest at the goal;
Are soonest at the goal
That is not gained by speed;
Then hold thee still, my heart,
For I shall wait his lead.
--Bayard Taylor.

As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of being. --Carl Jung

Lord of life, may I pause to remember that rest may not be obtained with wretched thoughts, nor can it be enjoyed in discontent. In my moments of rest wilt thou show me how to relax, and with tranquility may I gather hope for renewed ambition. Amen.

Know[3.7-23], Matt[100]

29 October (Day 302 / 63)

Rise, O my soul, with thy desires to heaven,
And with divinest contemplation use
Thy time where time's eternity is given,
And let vain thoughts no more thy thoughts abuse;
But down in darkness let them lie:
So live thy better, let thy worse thoughts die!
--Sir Walter Raleigh.

The great elements we know of are no mean comforters; the open sky sits upon our senses like a sapphire crown--the air is our robe of state, the Earth is our throne, and the Sea a mighty minstrel playing before it.
--John Keats.

Ah Lord Jehovah! behold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for thee.
--Jeremiah 32. 17.

That which the dream shows is the shadow of such wisdom as exists in man, even if during his waking state he may know nothing about it... We do not know it because we are fooling away our time with outward and perishing things, and are asleep in regard to that which is real within ourself.
--Philipus Aureolus Paracelsus

Almighty God, I thank thee for the power that gives me the breath of life. May I be willing to be controlled by its guiding care. Amen.

Know[3.7-24], TaoT[061]

30 October (Day 303 / 62)

And yet thou canst know,
And yet thou canst not see;
Wisdom and sight are slow
In poor humanity.
If thou couldst trust, poor soul,
In Him who rules the whole,
Thou wouldst find peace and rest;
Wisdom and right are well, but trust is best.
--Adelaide Anne Procter.

The heart to speak in vain essayed,
Nor could his purpose reach--
His will nor voice nor tongue obeyed,
His silence was his speech.
--John Quincy Adams.

But still believe that story wrong which ought not to be true.
--Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

Blessed is the man that maketh Jehovah his trust. --Psalm 40. 4.

My Father, may I not be given to unkindly speech. Deliver me from a critical spirit; and may I not encourage mistrust, but cultivate the kindly considerations in which life abounds. Amen.

Know[3.7-25], ZenT[063], Prov[101]

31 October (Day 304 / 61)

Ere, in the northern gale
The summer tresses of the trees are gone,
The woods of autumn, all around our vale,
Have put their glory on.
The mountains that unfold,
In their wide sweep, the colored landscape round,
Seem groups of giant kings, in purple and gold,
That guard the enchanted ground.
Ah! 'twere a lot too blessed
Forever in thy colored shades to stray;
Amid the kisses of the soft southwest
To rove and dream for aye;
And leave the vain low strife
That makes men mad; the tug for wealth and power,
The passions and the cares that wither life,
And waste its little hour.
--William Cullen Bryant.

Let the field exult, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy. --Psalm 96. 12.

Never does nature say one thing and wisdom another. --Juvenal

Just when the caterpillar thought the world was ending, she turned into a butterfly. --Proverb

My Father, may I have an appreciation of the wonderful creations of the earth. Give me a discriminating eye, that I may know the precious things that thou art growing; and throughout my life may I love the beautiful and choose that which will make my life worthy of growth. Amen.

Know[3.7-26], Dham[041]

Assess your journey for this month. Acknowledge your wins, learn from setbacks, and appreciate the moments that shaped your experience. Now, with a fresh month ahead, set your sights on new goals and look forward to the opportunities awaiting you.

01 November (Day 305 / 60)

O worship the King, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing his power and his love;
Our Shield and Defender, the ancient of days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.
Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.
--Robert Grant.

Ye shall walk in all the way which Jehovah your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.
--Deuteronomy 5. 33.

People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character. --Ralph Waldo Emerson

The greatest form of maturity is at harvest time. That is when we must learn how to reap without complaint if the amounts are small and how to to reap without apology if the amounts are big. --Jim Rohn

Almighty God, help me to make my life refulgent while I have the abundance of summer, that I may not find the November of life bleak and barren. Help me to live in the realities of life, that I may gain energy and repose, to use for the lonesome and anxious hours. May I be watchful for the conditions that thwart life, and with patience wait for the awakening of truth. Amen.

Review Step 11 this month; Know[3.7-27], Matt[101]

02 November (Day 306 / 59)

Facing it, always facing it, that's the way to get through. Face it.
--Joseph Conrad

Overmastering pain--the most deadly and tragical element in life--alas! pain has its own way with all of us; it breaks in, a rude visitant, upon the fairy garden where the child wanders in a dream, no less surely than it rules upon the field of battle, or sends the immortal war-god whimpering to his father; and innocence, no more than philosophy, can protect us from this sting.
--Robert Louis Stevenson.

My hopes retire; my wishes as before
Struggle to find their resting place in vain;
The ebbing sea thus beats against the shore;
The shore repels it; it returns again.
--W.S. Landor.

The truth that many people never understand, until it is too late, is that the more you try to avoid suffering the more you suffer because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt.
--Thomas Merton

Yet Jehovah will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me. --Psalm 42. 8.

Loving Father, I bless thee for thy goodness and tender mercy which is over all. May I trust thy provision and love, and as I trust myself to thee may I have faith to believe that thou wilt give me strength for what I may have to endure, and believe that thou wilt care for me, as thou dost care for all. Amen.

Know[3.7-28], TaoT[062]

03 November (Day 307 / 58)

Whither, midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way!
Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.
He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.
--William Cullen Bryant.

For Jehovah your God dried up the waters of the Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over. --Joshua 4. 23.

The love that matters to you is the love you give. This has been said many times, but it is not easy to grasp in a culture where everything is focused on receiving. --Eolake Stobblehouse

Almighty God, help me to guard against gratification that leads to disappointment, that I may not miss the true way. I pray that thou wilt lift me in my weakness, and carry me over the rough and discouraging places, that I may be made strong in thy loving care, and be able to continue alone. Amen.

Know[3.8-01], ZenT[064], Prov[102]

04 November (Day 308 / 57)

Keep me, I pray, in wisdom's way,
That I may truths eternal seek;
I need protecting care to-day--
My purse is light, my flesh is weak.
--Eugene Field.

No one could tell me where my Soul might be,
I searched for God, but God eluded me.
I sought my brother out, and found all three.
--Ernest H. Crosby.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths.
--Proverbs 3. 6.

Teach thy tongue to say, "I do not know," and thou shalt progress.
--Maimonides

My Father, may I not face sundown today while looking at life in a mirror that reflects my own privileges and prejudices, but may I see it as it is, known to those who are living to make it better. May the days to come prove my sincerity in wanting the truth that I might live by it, and help to do good with it. Amen.

Know[3.8-02], Dham[042]

05 November (Day 309 / 56)

The thing that goes the farthest
Toward making life worth while,
That costs the least, and does the most,
Is just a pleasant smile.
That smile that bubbles from a heart
That loves its fellow men
Will drive away the cloud of gloom
And coax the sun again.
--Anonymous.

One whom I knew intimately, and whose memory I revere, once in my hearing remarked that, "Unless we love people we cannot understand them." This was a new light to me. --Christina G. Rossetti.

Oil and perfume rejoice the heart; So doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of hearty counsel. --Proverbs 27. 9.

Good friendships are fragile things and require as much care as any other fragile and precious thing. --Randolph S. Bourne

Lord God, I pray that I am worthy of my friends. May I not fear to go where I am called, and go cheerfully, even though the way be dark and lonesome. Amen.

Know[3.8-03], Matt[102]

06 November (Day 310 / 55)

Look full into thy spirit's self,
The world of mystery scan;
What if thy way to faith in God
Should lie through faith in man?
--John Bright.

Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends, for it is one of God's best gifts. It involves many things, but above all, the power of going out of oneself and seeing and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another.
--Thomas Hughes.

There is a debt of mercy and pity, of charity and compassion, of relief and succor due to human nature, and payable from one man to another; and such as deny to pay it the distressed in the time of their abundance may justly expect it will be denied themselves in a time of want. --Burkitt.

Lord God, I earnestly entreat thee to show me if I may be cramping the happiness in another's life by forcing in my selfishness and demands. May I understand that perfect gifts are those that come through loving sacrifice. Make me ashamed to ask for what I refuse or prefer not to give. Amen.

Know[3.8-04], TaoT[063]

07 November (Day 311 / 54)

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right;
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.
--James Russell Lowell.

We cannot command veracity at will; the power of seeing and reporting truly is a form of health that has to be delicately guarded, and as an ancient rabbi has solemnly said, "The penalty of untruth is untruth."
--George Eliot.

Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions. --Ecclesiastes 7. 29

If you are unable to find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it? --Dogen

My Father, help me to speak the truth and guard the truth, that righteousness may be an abiding influence in my life. Amen.

Know[3.8-05], Prov[103]

08 November (Day 312 / 53)

The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet! the morning dew
Lies yet undried along my field of noon.
But now I pause a while in what I do,
And count the bell, and tremble lest I hear
(My work untrimmed) the sunset gun too soon.
--Robert Louis Stevenson.

I fear
Life's many changes, not Death's changelessness.
So perfect is this moment's passing cheer,
I needs must tremble lest it pass to less.
Thus in fickle love of life I live,
Lest fickle life me of my love deprive.
--Owen Meredith.

And Jehovah said unto Joshua, "Get thee up; wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face? Up, sanctify the people, and say, sanctify yourselves against tomorrow." --Joshua 7. 10, 13.

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now. --Chinese Proverb

Start from wherever you are and with whatever you've got. --Jim Rohn

Almighty God, help me in these fleeting days that I may not use my time to consider and hesitate, but be positive in my desires and pursue them. Grant that I may have the strength to hold each day precious, and live it more than consistently. Amen.

ZenT[065], Dham[043]

09 November (Day 313 / 52)

It takes great courage to faithfully follow what we know to be true. --Sara E. Anderson

The hero is not fed on sweets,
Daily his own heart he eats;
Chambers of the great are jails,
And head-winds right for royal sails.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The victor's road is the easy way.
Straight it stretches and climbs to where
Fame is waiting with garlands gay
To wreathe the fighter who clambers there.
There's applause in plenty and gold's red gleam
For the man who plays on the winning team.
The loser travels a longer lane;
Level it leads to a lonely land.
There's little glory for him to gain
The voices mock him on either hand;
But the man who wins in the greater game
Is the man who, beaten, fights on the same.
--G. Rice.

He thanked God, and took courage. --Acts 28. 15.

O Lord, I pray that whether I may be successful in the sight of the world, or whether I may be successful in my own sacrifices, I may have the freedom of courage, and be master of my life. Amen.

Matt[103]

10 November (Day 314 / 51)

And who will walk a mile with me
Along life's weary way?
A friend whose heart has eyes to see
The stars shine out o'er the darkening lea,
And the quiet rest at the end of the day--
A friend who knows and dares to say,
The brave sweet words that cheer the way
Where he walks a mile with me.
--Henry van Dyke.

As faith, so is God. --Martin Luther.

Learn the luxury of doing good. --Oliver Goldsmith.

Love is the ladder by which we climb up to the likeness of God.
--Johann von Schiller.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two.
--Matthew 5. 41.

My Father, may I not dwell in the selfish appearances of life, but live in the realities of simplicity. May I not only seek those who may return me pleasure, but may I find delight in brightening the walk of a weary friend. Amen.

Know[3.9-01], TaoT[064]

11 November (Day 315 / 50)

I'll not confer with Sorrow
Till to-morrow,
But joy shall have her way
This very day.
--Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

Shall we have ears on the stretch for the footfalls of sorrow that never come, but be deaf to the whirr of the wings of happiness that fill all space?
--Maurice Maeterlinck.

This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, punishment will overtake, us; now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household. --2 Kings 7. 9.

What do people mean when they talk about unhappiness? It is not so much unhappiness as impatience that from time to time possesses men, and then they choose to call themselves miserable. --Goethe

Loving Father, I pray that thou wilt help me to overcome unhappiness. May I not let depression overpower me, but claim the promises of joy that are open to every life. May I be blest by my own cheerfulness and encourage others to possess it. Amen.

Prov[104]

12 November (Day 316 / 49)

In life it is difficult to say who do you the most mischief—enemies with the worst intentions or friends with the best. --Edward Bulwer.

The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel.
--William Shakespeare.

Where persons who ought to esteem and love each other are kept asunder, as often happens, by some cause which three words of frank explanation would remove, they are fortunate if they possess an indiscreet friend who blurts out the whole truth. --Thomas B. Macaulay.

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted,
Who did eat of my bread,
Hath lifted up his heel against me.
--Psalm 41. 9.

Lord God, help me to consider more carefully what I offer to my friends; and may I not be critical of what I receive from my friends. May I not be a hindrance instead of a help to those who would have my companionship. Amen.

Dham[044]

13 November (Day 317 / 48)

Little do we know our own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the True Success is to labor.
--Robert Louis Stevenson.

Whether thy work be fine or coarse, planting corn or writing epics, so only it be honest work, done to thine own approbation, it shall earn a reward to sense as well as to the thought. --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Nature gives to labor; and to labor alone. In a very garden of Eden a man would starve but for human exertion. --Henry George.

My Father, make pure living clear to me, that I may not be deceived in my work; and may I not use my working hours searching for more suitable work, but may I be sure in what I am that I may feel secure in what I undertake to do. Amen.

ZenT[066], Matt[104]

14 November (Day 318 / 47)

Give us, O give us, the man who sings at his work! Be his occupation what it may, he is better than any of those who follow the same pursuit in silent sullenness. --Thomas Carlyle.

What doctor possesses such curative resources as those latent in a single ray of hope? The mainspring of life is in the heart. Joy is the vital air of the soul, and grief is a kind of asthma complicated by atony. --Amiel

I will sing unto Jehovah as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have any being. --Psalm 104. 33

True contentment depends not upon what we have; a tub was large enough for Diogenes, but a world was too little for Alexander. --Colton

Loving Father, restore the spirit of gentleness and meekness if it may be withered within me, that I may be contented. May I make it a habit to be happy over my work and cheerful about my duties. May I never lose the view of the glory of thy kingdom. Amen.

TaoT[065]

15 November (Day 319 / 46)

The parting sun sends out a glow
Across the placid bay,
Touching with glory all the show--
A breeze! Up helm! Away!
Careening to the wind, they reach,
With laugh and call, the shore.
They've left their footprints on the beach,
But them I hear no more.
--Richard Henry Dana.

Art little? Do thy little well:
And for thy comfort know
The great can do their greatest work
No better than just so.
--Goethe.

To speak gratitude is courteous and pleasant, but to live gratitude is to touch heaven. --Johannes A. Gaertner

Lord God, grant that if I may be complaining of what Providence has not sent me, I may grateful for what Providence has given me. May I not pause too long over what I have done, or over what I might have done, but may I be appreciative of what thou dost expect of me and endeavor to accomplish it. Amen.

Prov[105]

16 November (Day 320 / 45)

Judge not the workings of his brain
And of his heart thou canst not see;
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain
In God's pure light may only be
A scar, brought from some well-won field,
Where thou would'st only faint and yield.
And judge none lost; but wait and see,
With hopeful pity, not disdain;
The depth of the abyss may be
The measure of the height of pain
And love and glory that may raise
The soul to God in after days!
--Adelaide A. Procter.

I am more afraid of deserving criticism, than of receiving it.
--William Gladstone.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. --Matthew 7.1.

Lord Jehovah, judge of all mankind, forbid that I should set myself as a judge of another's life, and neglect to live for the higher judgment of my own. May I not be absorbed in that which thrives in darkness, but live in the light of honesty and gentleness. Amen.

Dham[045]

17 November (Day 321 / 44)

There are evergreen men and women in the world, praise be to God! Not many of them, but a few. They are not the showy folk… They are only the quiet, strong folk; they are stronger than Fate. The storms of life sweep over them, and the biting frosts creep round them; but the winds and the frosts pass away, and they are still standing, green and straight.
--Jerome K. Jerome

And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. --Psalm 1.3.

The best preparation for the future is the present well seen to, the last duty done. --George MacDonald

Trust no future howe'er pleasant;
Let the dead past bury its dead;
Act,--act in the living present,
Heart within and God o'erhead!
--Longfellow

Gracious Lord, may I not spend most in equipment and forget the tides, which may desert me on the sands, or the rocks in the channels, which may crush the finest vessel. May I be prepared for the hard knocks if they come, but may I know how to keep clear of them. Amen.

Matt[105]

18 November (Day 322 / 43)

If e'er when man had fallen asleep,
I heard a voice, "Believe no more,"
A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath, the heart
Stood up and answered, "I have felt."
--Alfred Tennyson.

Faith is the deep want of the soul. We have faculties for the spiritual, as truly as for the outward world. God, the foundation of all existence, may become to the mind the most real of all beings. The believer feels himself resting on an everlasting foundation. --William Henry Channing.

And they said one to another, "Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?"
--Luke 24. 32.

Lord God, save me from a hard and doubting heart. May I be trustful and come to thee in faith. All the days of my life may my lips sing thy praise as I unfold thy love and purposes. Amen.

ZenT[067], TaoT[066]

19 November (Day 323 / 42)

Be good at the depths of you, and you will discover that those who surround you will be good even to the same depths. Therein lies a force that has no name; a spiritual rivalry that has no resistance.
--Maurice Maeterlinck.

And son I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock, as her prize.
--Robert Browning.

First of all, I must make myself a man; if I do not succeed in that, I can succeed in nothing. --James A. Garfield.

Not all those who wander are lost. --J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

Eternal God, I thank thee for all the sterling elements that greaten the individual life. I pray that I may not desire to be kept a small creature, but seek to grow in wisdom and love, and qualify for mighty purposes and achievements. Amen.

Prov[106]

20 November (Day 324 / 41)

Then why, my soul, dost thou complain?
Why drooping seek the dark recess?
Shake off the melancholy chain,
For God created all to bless.
The gloomy mantle of the night,
Which on my sinking spirits steals,
Will vanish at the morning light,
Which God, my East, my Sun, reveals.
--Thomas Chatterton.

Lady, there is a hope that all men have--
Some mercy for their faults, a grassy place
To rest in, and a flower-strewn, gentle grave:
Another hope which purifies our race,
That when that fearful bourne forever past,
They may find rest--and rest so long to last.
I seek it not, I ask no rest forever,
My path is onward to the farthest shores.
--William Ellery Channing.

He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay; and he set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he put a new song in my mouth. --Psalm 40. 2, 3.

My Father, I pray that I may have patience to live through the difficulties of life. May I correct my faults, that they may not destroy my peace and take from me my strength; help me to center my life in brightness and hope. Amen.

Dham[046]

21 November (Day 325 / 40)

There is not a creature from England's king
To the peasant that delves the soil,
Who knows half the pleasures the seasons bring
If he had not his share of toil.
--Barry Cornwall.

It may be proved, with much certainty, that God intends no man to live in this world without working; but it seems to me no less evident that he intends every man to be happy in his work. Now, in order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it; and they must not do too much of it; and they must have a sense of success in it. --John Ruskin.

My Father, if my work seems hard to-day, may I not cease working if I grow weary, but may my strength be renewed to continue my work. May the aim of my work be to please thee, and to help in the progress of humanity. Amen.

Matt[106]

22 November (Day 326 / 39)

Sometimes the sun, unkindly hot,
My garden makes a desert spot,
Sometimes a blight upon the tree
Takes all my fruit away from me;
And then with throes of bitter pain
Rebellious passions rise and swell;
And so I sing and all is well.
--Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like benediction
That follows after prayer.
--Henry W. Longfellow.

Songs consecrate to truth and liberty. --Percy Bysshe Shelley.

David took the harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. --1 Samuel 16. 23.

Almighty God, I thank thee that thou wilt come to me as my heart cries for need. I bless thee that thou dost come to me as my lips sing thy praise. I pray that I may be saved from a cruel and cheerless heart, and be a sharer of the songs that are sung to the soul. Amen.

TaoT[067]

23 November (Day 327 / 38)

Asleep, awake, by night or day,
The friends I seek are seeking me;
No word can drive my bark astray,
Nor change the tide of destiny.
The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal wave unto the sea;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me.
--John Burroughs.

If a man could make a single rose we would give him an empire; yet flowers no less beautiful are scattered in profusion over the world, and no one regards them. --Martin Luther.

Let patience have its perfect work. --James 1. 4.

We are born for a higher destiny than that of earth; there is a realm where the rainbow never fades, where the stars will be spread before us like islands that slumber on the ocean, and where the beings that pass before us like shadows will stay in our presence forever. --Lytton

My Creator, may I remember that after thou didst create the earth thou didst say it was good. May I love the fragrance and beauty of the flowers which were made to nourish the soul, and the fruits and herbs which were made to nourish the body. May my song of thanksgiving be new every morning, as I awake in the abundance of what thou hast prepared. Amen.

ZenT[068], Matt[107]

24 November (Day 328 / 37)

I waited long until the sky
Should give me of its blue
To weave and wear, and share, and weave
The very stars into.
The days they went, the years they went,
And left my hands instead
Another thing for wonderment,
The mending and the bread.
Ah me, and one must set a hand
To burnish up the task,
And hush and hush the old demand
A wakeful heart will ask.
But with a star's clear eye on me,
O, I can hear it said,
'What souls there be that only see
The mending and the bread!'
--Josephine P. Peabody.

For the life is more than the food, and the body than the raiment. --Luke 12. 23.

The riches of a commonwealth
Are free, strong minds and hearts of health.
And more to her than gold or grain,
The cunning hand and cultured brain.
--John G. Whittier.

Men spend their lives in anticipations, in determining to be vastly happy at some period or other, when they have time. But the present time has one advantage over every other--it is our own. Past opportunities are gone, future are not come. --Colton

My Father, I pray that thou wilt help me, that I may not consume my life in preparing clothes and food for my body. Amen.

Dham[047]

25 November (Day 329 / 36)

I will not kill or hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life and guard and perfect all natural beauty on earth. I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into all the higher powers of duty and happiness, not in rivalship or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honor of others and for the joy and peace of my own life. --John Ruskin

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea.
--Isaiah 11. 9

It is impossible for the mind which is not totally destitute of piety, to behold the sublime, the awful, the amazing works of creation and providence; the heavens with their luminaries, the mountains, the ocean, the storm, the earthquake, and the volcano; the circuit of the seasons and the revolutions of empires; without marking in them all the mighty hand of God, and feeling strong emotions of reverence toward the Author of these stupendous works. --Dwight

Lord God, I rejoice in the blessedness of peace. May I not try to force peace where cruelty has entered, but keep a watch for what may come into my life. I pray that if I may be in turbulence to-day, thou wilt quiet me with thy peace which knows no fear or wrong. Amen.

TaoT[068]

26 November (Day 330 / 35)

Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: He is gracious, and merciful, and righteous. --Psalm 112. 4

The decrees of Providence are inscrutable. In spite of man's short-sighted endeavors to dispose of events according to his own wishes and his own purposes, there is an Intelligence beyond his reason, which holds the scales of justice, and promotes his well-being, in spite of his puny efforts. --Morier

I'd like a way
To change the clouds that bring us sorrow,
And build to-day a bright to-morrow;
To banish cares that tarry long,
And have the days like the blue-bird's song--
I'd like a way.
I'll find a way--
I'll set sail when the breeze is high,
And calmly drift when pleasure's nigh;
I'll steer a course afar from tears,
And take in joy the coming years--
I'll find a way.
I've lost the way!
Out through the gloom a beam of light
Looks like a purpose looming bright!
Up with the sail! I'll out to sea
And bring that purpose back with me,
Or go its way.
--M.B.S.

My Father, I pray that I may not through indifference wander without a purpose, or through discouragement stumble through the darkness. May I be drawn to the light by the vision of hopeful and useful days. Amen.

Matt[108]

27 November (Day 331 / 34)

Be this thy brazen bulwark of defense, to preserve a conscience void of offense, and never turn pale with guilt. --Horace.

Is life a noxious weed which whirlwinds sow?
A useless flint o'er which the waters flow?
Not so!
A life well spent has not its weight in gold;
It is the clearest crystal earth doth hold,
A gem beside which suns seem dull and cold.
--[Attributed to] Robert Louis Stevenson.

Repose without stagnation is the state most favorable to happiness. "The great felicity of life," says Seneca, "is to be without perturbations." --Bovee

Lord God, I pray that my life may not be impoverished by neglect, nor burdened with indulgences, but that it may be kept in condition for high endeavors. Grant that I may never be content to rest in satisfaction and ease when I could struggle and accomplish a good work. Amen.

Dham[048]

28 November (Day 332 / 33)

The sorrow for the dead is the only sorrow from which we refuse to be divorced. Every other wound we seek to heal, every other affliction to forget. Take warning by the bitterness of this thy contrite affliction over the dead, and henceforth be more faithful and affectionate in the discharge of thy duties to the living.
--Washington Irving.

Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Every grief and pine
Runs a joy with a silken twine.
--William Blake.

Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.
--John 16. 20.

True hope is based on the energy of character. A strong mind always hopes, and has always cause to hope, because it knows the mutability of human affairs, and how slight a circumstance may change the whole course of events. Such a spirit, too, rests upon itself; it is not confined to partial views or to one particular object. And if at last all should be lost, it has saved itself. --Von Knebel

Heavenly Father, grant that I may not lose the kindness that I may give and receive to-day. I thank thee for the memories of yesterday, the hope of to-morrow, and the wisdom of to-day. May I have a vision of immortality that will keep me through the closest sorrow. Amen.

ZenT[069], TaoT[069]

29 November (Day 333 / 32)

Truth is sensitive and jealous of the least encroachment of its sacredness.
--A. Bronson Alcott.

Faith that withstood the shocks of toil and time,
Hope that defied despair,
Patience that conquered care,
And loyalty whose courage was sublime;

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal,
To earn the true success;
To live to love, to bless,
And make death proud to take a royal soul.
--Louisa M. Alcott.

Nor is it wiser to weep a true occasion lost,
But trim our sails, and let old bygones be.
--Alfred Tennyson.

In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal. --Titus 1. 2.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live in truth; and without fear of life or death live content in the faith of eternal life. Amen.

Matt[109]

30 November (Day 334 / 31)

He gave it for his opinion that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.
--Jonathan Swift.

That man may last, but never lives,
Who much receives, but nothing gives;
Whom none can love, whom none can thank,
Creation's blot, creation's blank.
--Thomas Gibbons.

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. --Luke 6. 38

Life is made up, not of great sacrifices or duties, but of little things, in which smiles and kindness, and small obligations, given habitually, are what win and preserve the heart, and secure comfort. --Sir H. Davy

My Father, preserve my soul from all selfishness. May I delight in thy teaching as I trust in thy word. I pray that I may not only speak truthfully, but that I may leave the door of my spirit open, that truth may always enter and abide continually. Amen.

Dham[049]

As one month ends, use this juncture to reflect on your progress. Recognize your accomplishments and weave lessons learned into your story. With the new month, align your aspirations with purpose, setting the stage for continued success.

01 December (Day 335 / 30)

We would fill the hours with the sweetest things,
If we had but a day:
We should drink alone at the purest springs,
In our upward way:
We should guide our wayward or wearied will,
By the clearest light:
We should keep our eyes on the heavenly hills,
If they lay in sight:
We should be from our clamorous selves set free,
To work and pray:
And be what the Father would have us to be,
If we had but a day.
--Margaret E. Sangster.

The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament. I turn my little omelet in the pan for the love of God. When I am done, if I have nothing to do, I prostrate myself on the ground and worship my God. --Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God

Gracious Father, help me to understand that my life grows out of what I put into my days. Forgive me for the unspoken words and the kind deeds which I kept for rare days, and had so few occasions to use. May I be as useful in kindness as I am in work, remembering that to thee every day is a golden day. Amen.

Review Step 12 this month; TaoT[070]

02 December (Day 336 / 29)

The solitude of life is known to us all; for the most part we are alone, and the voices of friends come only faint and broken across the impassable gulfs which surround every human soul. --Hamilton Mabie.

To have an ideal or to have none, to have this ideal or that, this is what digs gulfs between men, even between those who live in the same family circle, under the same roof, or in the same room. You must love with the same love, think with the same thoughts as someone else if you are to escape solitude. --Amiel.

The plans of the heart belong to man; but the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah. --Proverbs 16. 1.

Lord God, help me to take in the glory of life, that my spirit may never be lonely, even though I may have to be much alone. I pray that thou wilt spare me the loneliness and the solitude that may be brought on by selfishness. Make me considerate of others. May I soar above the disappointments and losses that may come to me, and stay where I may have thy companionship. Amen.

Matt[110]

03 December (Day 337 / 28)

To know what you prefer, instead of humbly saying "Amen" to what the world tells you you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive.
--Robert Louis Stevenson.

There is precious instruction to be got by finding we were wrong. Let a man try faithfully, manfully to be right. He will grow daily more and more right.
--Thomas Carlyle.

The hero is the man who is immovably centered. --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water.
--Hebrews 10. 22.

Gracious Father, grant that I may not be content to follow through ignorance and indolence and be led to the lowly paths of life. Make my journey positive; and from my surroundings may I look out and struggle to mount to the highest ideals, that I may be qualified to select the best in life. Amen.

ZenT[070], Dham[050]

04 December (Day 338 / 27)

It is with a man's soul as it is with nature: the beginning of Creation is--Light. Till the eye have visions the whole members are in bonds. Divine moment, when over the tempest-tost Soul, as once over the wild-weltering Chaos, it is spoken: Let there be Light! --Thomas Carlyle.

What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the light of this great argument
I may assert eternal Providence
And justify the ways of God to men.
--John Milton.

For thou art my lamp, O Jehovah; And Jehovah will lighten my darkness.
--2 Samuel 22. 29.

My Lord, forgive me if I have allowed bitterness and misery to darken my life, for my soul yearns continually for the light. In thy compassion lead me to the "sunny side of the road where the beautiful flowers grow," that my path may be made bright and cheerful all the rest of the way. Amen.

TaoT[071]

05 December (Day 339 / 26)

A cold wind stirs the blackthorn
To burgeon and to blow,
Besprinkling half-green hedges
With flakes and sprays of snow.

Through coldness and through keenness,
Dear hearts take comfort so:
Somewhere or other doubtless
These make the blackthorn blow.
--Christina G. Rossetti.

There are some men and women in whose company we are always at our best. All the best stops in our nature are drawn out by their intercourse, and we find a music in our souls never there before. --Henry Drummond.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.
--Hebrews 10. 24.

My Father, I thank thee for life. Make me sensitive to the unseen influences that bring thy messages. May I be led where great riches may be found through small kindnesses, and where I may learn from the meek the beauty of earth. Amen.

Matt[111]

06 December (Day 340 / 25)

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here--should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
--Robert Browning.

Hitch your wagon to a star. --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When Thou saidst, "Seek ye My face;" my heart said unto Thee, "Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek." --Psalm 27. 8.

Almighty God, show me what thou hast given for me to do, that I may not leave undone that which is mine. Forgive me for useless planning and blind asking for the things which cannot be mine. I pray that my work may be honest work, well done, and acceptable for thy service. Amen.

Dham[051]

07 December (Day 341 / 24)

It is virtue--yes, let me repeat it again--it is virtue alone that can give birth, strength, and permanency to friendship. For virtue is a uniform and steady principle ever acting consistently with itself. --Cicero.

A common friendship--who talks of a common friendship? There is no such thing in the world. On earth no word is more sublime.
--Henry Drummond.

But thou shalt surely open thy hand unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need. --Deuteronomy 15. 8.

Lord God, wilt thou reveal to me my weakness if I may be insincere; and give me the strength that I lack to keep me true. May I not take advantage of the ignorant, or thoughtlessly lead the innocent into temptation. Grant that I may be a trustful and kind friend. Amen.

TaoT[072]

08 December (Day 342 / 23)

Into the dusk of the East,
Gray with the coming of night,
This may we know at least--
After the night comes light!
Over the mariners' graves,
Grim in the depths below,
Buoyantly breasting the waves,
Into the East we go.
On to a distant strand,
Wonderful, far, unseen,
On to a stranger land,
Skimming the seas between;
On through the days and nights,
Hope in each sailor's breast,
On till the harbor lights
Flash on the shores of rest!
--J.H. Jowett.

So he bringeth them unto their desired haven. --Psalm 107. 30.

Lord God, I pray that thou wilt provide me with thy indwelling peace. May it keep me reconciled to the decline of years, and enable me to bear the earthly separation from those whom I love. May I always hope and trust in thee. Amen.

ZenT[071], Matt[112]

09 December (Day 343 / 22)

Doth God exact day labor, light denied?
I fondly ask: but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work, or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."
--John Milton.

Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe.
--Hebrews 12. 28.

My Father, teach me to select my work from that which is noble and true. May I not mold my life in affectation or feel that I must imitate the lives of others, but grant that I may perfect my life through experiences which are worthy of increasing endeavors. Amen.

Dham[052]

10 December (Day 344 / 21)

Be of good cheer. Do not think of to-day's failures, but of success that may come to-morrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will have a joy in overcoming obstacles--a delight in climbing rugged paths which you would perhaps never know if you did not sometimes slip backward, if the road were always smooth and pleasant. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost.
--Helen Keller.

We rise by things that are beneath our feet,
By what we have mastered by good and gain,
By the pride deposed and passion slain,
And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet.
--J.G. Holland.

He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with, me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. --Revelation 3. 21.

My Father, I pray that I may not be given to contradicting and doubting, nor take for granted that which needs to be considered. Grant that I may have the faith and strength of heart to fulfill the longings of my soul. Amen.

TaoT[073]

11 December (Day 345 / 20)

Lord, subdue our selfish will;
Each to each our tempers suit,
By thy modulating skill,
Heart to heart, as lute to lute.
--Charles Wesley.

And this is the world's supreme need to-day; more than our eloquence, or our knowledge, or our wealth, or all else besides, it needs our love. True, even love may sometimes err; but the cure for love's mistakes is just more love; we often blunder because we do not love enough. God help us all that, like Whittier, we may live and die, giving our love to the world. --George Jackson.

Lord God, help me to see the beauty of the world, and through my duty may I find the love in the world. May I not spend my life in discontent, but may I remember that thou hast said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." Fill my heart with compassion, that I may love my fellow man as I love myself. Amen.

Matt[113]

12 December (Day 346 / 19)

A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one.
And those who live for models for the mass
Are singly of more value than they all.
--Robert Browning.

Give me the power to labor for mankind;
Make me the mouth of such as cannot speak;
Eyes let me be to groping men and blind;
A conscience to the base; and to the weak
Let me be hands and feet, and to the foolish, mind;
And lead still further on such as thy kingdom seek.
--Theodore Parker.

I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. --Job 29. 15.

Almighty God, wilt thou guide me in the direction where I may choose a useful life; open wide my heart as well as my eyes, that I may early see my work and be diligent in its prosecution. Reveal to me, when I may have failed, that I may do better to-morrow. Amen.

Dham[053]

13 December (Day 347 / 18)

When the clouds of sorrow gather over us, we see nothing beyond them, nor can imagine how they can be dispelled; yet a new day succeeded to the night, and sorrow is never long without a dawn of ease. --Dr. Samuel Johnson.

There come to great, solitary, and sorely smitten souls moments of clear insight, of assurance of victory, of unspeakable fellowship with truth and life and God, which outweigh years of sorrow and bitterness. --Hamilton Mabie.

And ye therefore now have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you. --John 16. 22.

My Father, may I remember that the days of my life that I give over to grief can never be reclaimed. Help me that I may not want to keep sorrow in my life, but with faith may I believe that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Amen.

ZenT[072], TaoT[074]

14 December (Day 348 / 17)

Seldom can the heart be lonely,
If it seek a lonelier still;
Self-forgetting, seeking only
Emptier cups of love to fill.
--Frances R. Havergal.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought.
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.
--William Shakespeare.

The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary. --Isaiah 50. 4.

Gracious Father, keep me cheerful and courageous, that I may not be given to weary murmurings. May my hours of solitude be spent profitably as they pass. Grant that I may be a help to those who are in need of sympathy and encouragement, and through the peace that is given to me help them to a tranquil life. Amen.

Matt[114]

15 December (Day 349 / 16)

Yet frequent visitors shall kiss the shrine,
And ever keep its vestal lamp alight;
All noble thoughts, all dreams divinely bright,
That waken or delight this soul of mine.
--F.B. Sanborn.

One small cloud can hide the sunlight;
Loose one string, the pearls are scattered;
Think one thought, a soul may perish;
Say one word, a heart may break.
--A.A. Procter.

Self-scrutiny is often the most unpleasant, and always the most difficult, of moral actions. But it is also the most important and salutary; for, as the wisest of the Greeks said, "An unexamined life is not worth living."
--J. Strachan.

Father, help me that I may not be thoughtless and unkind. May I be gentle and sympathetic. Forgive me for any unhappiness which I may have made, and may it be mine to know the rejoicing that comes from showing kindness. Amen.

Dham[054]

16 December (Day 350 / 15)

So live that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him and lies down to pleasant dreams.
--William Cullen Bryant.

As the wind extinguishes a taper but kindles the fire, so absence is the death of an ordinary passion, but lends strength to the greater.
--La Rochefoucauld.

If a man die, shall he live again? --Job 14. 14.

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.
-Attributed to Mary Frye, 1944

Heavenly Father, with thy help may I enter into the hope that overcomes the fear of death. May my days be full of aspiration, and through faith may my life move toward the eternal and the sublime. Amen.

TaoT[075]

17 December (Day 351 / 14)

The night is mother of the day,
The winter of the spring;
And ever upon old decay
The greenest mosses cling.
Behind the cloud the starlight lurks,
Through showers the sunbeams fall;
For God, who loveth all his works,
Has left his hope with all.
--John Greenleaf Whittier.

The sun set; but not his hope:
Stars rose; his faith was earlier up.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson.

What I am I have made myself. --Sir Humphry Davy.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall dwell in safety. --Psalm 16. 9.

My Father, may I never be content to pass by thy beautiful offerings and keep on in wretched despair. Save me if I may be inclining toward misery. Give me the spirit of repose, and help me to confide in thee as I daily seek the strength of thy love. Amen.

Matt[115]

18 December (Day 352 / 13)

And let this feeble body fail,
And let it faint or die;
My soul shall quit this mournful vale,
And soar to worlds on high.
--Charles Wesley.

It were better to live an immortal life and be robbed of immortality hereafter by some supernal power, than to live the mortal, fleshly animal life, and live it endlessly. Who would not rather have a right to immortality than to be immortal without a right to be? --Lyman Abbott.

So when a great man dies,
For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the paths of men.
--Henry W. Longfellow.

My Father, I pray that I may be spared the deprivations that may come from years spent in selfishness. Help me to realize before it is too late how little self can hold and how much remorse may accumulate. Help me to aspire to ideals that compel me to live an immortal life. Amen.

ZenT[073], Dham[055]

19 December (Day 353 / 12)

If a man is to be a pillar in the temple of his God by and by, he must be some kind of a prop in God's house to-day. We are here to support, not to be supported. No one can be a living stone on the foundations of the Spiritual House which is God's habitation without being a foundation to the stones above him. --Maltbie Babcock.

He that overcometh I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more. --Revelation 3. 12.

Since trifles make the sum of human things,
And half our misery from our foibles springs;
Since life's best joys consist in peace and ease,
O let the ungentle spirit learn from hence,
A small unkindness is a great offense.
--Hannah More.

My Father, grant that I may not deceive myself and expect big results from little efforts; nor be willing to receive assistance and refuse my support. May I not only be anxious to give others all that I can, and share their burdens, but may I be glad to help make fewer burdens for others to bear. Amen.

Wisd[4.1-01], TaoT[076]

20 December (Day 354 / 11)

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
--William Shakespeare.

I will not doubt the love untold
Which not my worth nor want hath bought,
Which wooed me young and wooes me old,
And to this evening hath me brought.
--Henry David Thoreau.

Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. --Jeremiah 81. 3.

Loving Father, teach me the secret of constancy, that none may ever be disappointed in me. May I not reckon what I give on recompense, but have the spirit of giving which has no measure for what it may receive in return. May I remember thy love which will hold me to deeper reverence and devotion. Amen.

Wisd[4.1-02], Matt[116]

21 December (Day 355 / 10)

To think and to feel constitute the two grand divisions of men and genius--the men of reasoning and the men of imagination. --Disraeli.

Grow old along with me! the best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand who saith, a whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!
--Robert Browning.

But the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. --Proverbs 4. 18.

All shall be well, and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.
--Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, 14th century

Almighty God, I pray that I may have the grace to penetrate the deep things of life and test their truth and greatness. May I have faith in thy power and train for the best which thou hast made possible for me to live. Help me to think and feel aright, that I may be thine to-day, and in the days of to-morrow may I still be thine, ever keeping bright memories of past days. Amen.

Wisd[4.1-03], Dham[056]

22 December (Day 356 / 9)

Love and Pain
Make their own measure of all things that be.
No clock's slow ticking marks their deathless strain;
The life they own is not the life we see;
Love's single moment is eternity.
--Thomas W. Higginson.

Life is made stronger
Giving, receiving;
Love is made longer
Hoping, believing.
Life is made sweeter,
Truly worth living;
Love is completer,
Trusting, forgiving.
--M.B.S.

Loving Father, I thank thee that every morn breaks in a new day without the sadness of yesterday or the gladness of to-morrow. I pray that I may not lose the love and joy that it brings to-day. Amen.

Wisd[4.1-04], TaoT[077]

23 December (Day 357 / 8)

When heaven endows you with all gifts, you are an incomplete being if you stay still in your corner instead of taking advantage of your real value.
--Marie Bashkirtseff.

THERE is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jehovah is the strength of my life. --Psalm 27. 1.

Heavenly Father, I pray that thou wilt reverse my standards of life if I may be striving only for selfish gain. May I care for all that I could be, and may I care for where I should be found, but, most of all, may I care for what I really am. Help me to keep my mind on thee that I may find delight in doing thy will. Amen.

ZenT[074], Matt[117]

24 December (Day 358 / 7)

We take care of our health, we lay up money, we make our roof tight and our clothing sufficient, but who provides wisely that we shall not be wanting in the best property of all… friends? --Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Ah, friend, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.
--Matthew Arnold.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.
--Proverbs 27. 6.

Gracious Lord, fill my life with the spirit of love and sacrifice. I bless thee for the deep fellowships and tender intimacies; and ask thy blessing for all, as my heart rings with joy for those whom I love. Amen.

Wisd[4.1-05], Dham[057]

25 December (Day 359 / 6)

There is no great and no small
To the Soul that maketh all:
And where it cometh, all things are
And it cometh everywhere.
I am owner of the sphere,
Of the seven stars and the solar year,
Of Caesar's hand, and Plato's brain,
Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Life, which ought to be a thing complete in itself, and ought to be spent partly in gathering materials, and partly in drawing inferences, is apt to be a hurried accumulation lasting to the edge of the tomb. We are put into the world, I cannot help feeling, to be rather than do. --Arthur C. Benson.

To be doing good deeds is man's most glorious task. --Sophocles

The highest goodness is like water. Water benefits all things and does not compete. It stays in the lowly places which others despise. Therefore, it is near the Eternal. --Lao-Tzu

God, please bring your peace into my life. Help me to walk the path that leads to understanding and fulfillment. Let me see your perfect will being done in me and through me. Amen.

TaoT[078]

26 December (Day 360 / 5)

Jehovah, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too wonderful for me. --Psalm 131. 1.

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.
Nor you, ye proud, impute to those the fault,
If memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where, through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault,
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.
Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
--Thomas Gray.

Gracious Father, give me the courage to live my life, and the endurance to overcome the disappointments that may come to me. May I not be neglectful of the great opportunities of which I am privileged to take advantage. May I not be pretentious of what I have not done, or boastful of what I am, but with my best ability live in truth. Amen.

ZenT[075], Matt[118]

27 December (Day 361 / 4)

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse, as his portion; that, though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till.
--Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Knowing ourselves, our world, our task so great,
Our time so brief, 'tis clear if we refuse
The means so limited, the tools so rude
To execute our purpose, life will fleet,
And we shall fade, and leave our task undone.
--Robert Browning.

Lord God of life, give me the desire to learn, and the wisdom to live in my best. May I not fail to culture my mind and heart and make life productive and worthy. Help me to see the mistakes that I have made in the past, and in the year that is approaching not only try to avoid them, but try to make amends for them. Amen.

ZenT[076], TaoT[079]

28 December (Day 362 / 3)

The hearts of men are their books; events are their tutors; great actions are their eloquence. --Thomas B. Macaulay.

Be of good courage, and let us play the man for our people, and for the cities of our God: and Jehovah do that which seemeth him good.
--2 Samuel 10. 12.

Lord God, I pray that my estimate of life may not be as I take it, but as thou hast given it for peace and prosperity. Teach me my duty to you, and make me useful in uplifting and serving humanity. Amen.

ZenT[077], Dham[058]

29 December (Day 363 / 2)

One example is worth a thousand arguments. --William E. Gladstone.

One day at a time! That's all it can be
No faster than that is the hardest of fate,
And days have their limit, however we
Begin them too early or stretch them late.
--J.R. Miller.

He lives happy and master of himself
Who can say, as each day passes on,
I have lived! no matter whether to-morrow
The great Father shall give us a clouded sky or a clear day.
--Horace.

Give us this day our daily bread. --Matthew 6. 11.

Eternal God, guard me against the love of praise, that I may not lose the sense of duty. Start me for the right places and give me strength with my days, that I may press toward their possession. Deliver me from drifting when it is mine to pull against the tide, that I may not be carried out of my course. Shield me from the storms that may gather about me, and bring us all to the desired haven safe in thy keeping. Amen.

ZenT[078], TaoT[080]

30 December (Day 364 / 1)

Blessed be Yahweh,
Because he has heard the voice of my petitions.
Yahweh is my strength and my shield.
My heart has trusted in him, and I am helped.
Therefore my heart greatly rejoices.
With my song I will thank him.
--Psalms 30

But thou shalt remember Jehovah thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth. --Deuteronomy 8. 18.

Almighty God, as I come to thee wilt thou forgive me for the errors I have made, and for the promises that I have broken. Help me to be true to you, to others, and to myself. Remind me of my opportunities as I breathe in thy blessings, "Lest I forget!" Amen.

ZenT[079], Dham[059]

31 December (Day 365)

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.
Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrow lust of gold:
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.
--Alfred Tennyson.

Let every dawn of morning be to you as the beginning of life, and every setting sun be to you as its close. --John Ruskin.

We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly! yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost forever:

Or like forgotten lyres, whose dissonant strings
Give various response to each varying blast,
To whose frail frame no second motion brings
One mood or modulation like the last.

We rest. A dream has power to poison sleep;
We rise. One wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away:

It is the same! For, be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free:
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Nought may endure but mutability!
--Percy Bysshe Shelley

My Father, as I look to the past days, I feel much of my happiness and much of my misery has come from my own choice. May I be more watchful of my standards and less wasteful of my time, and keep a poise in life that will leave a memory of well-spent days. For the year that has passed and for its blessings I thank thee. Amen.

ZenT[080], TaoT[081]

As the year ends, December concludes not only as a month's finale but also as the closing chapter of an entire year. Look back on the experiences, challenges, and triumphs woven throughout the past twelve months. Celebrate the victories, reveiew the lessons, and bid farewell to the moments that have shaped your journey. Let the old year fade into history with a sense of closure. Carry forward the wisdom gained and approach the upcoming month with a sense of anticipation.

4.2 Zen Thoughts

ZenT[001] Before the first step is taken the goal is reached. Before the tongue is moved the speech is finished. More than brilliant intuition is needed to find the right path. If you were in the past and if you will be in the future, then who is reading these words at this moment?

ZenT[002] A wise man held up a stick and said, "If you call this a stick, you oppose its reality. If you call this a not-stick, you ignore fact... Now what do you wish to call this?"

ZenT[003] Going back to the origin is called peace; it means reversion to destiny. Reversion to destiny is called eternity. He who knows eternity is called enlightened.

ZenT[004] Words cannot describe everything. The heart's message cannot be delivered in words. If one receives words literally, he will be lost. If he tries to explain in words, he will not attain enlightenment in this life.

ZenT[005] The moon above the clouds is always the same moon. The mountains and rivers below are all different. Each is happy in itself.

ZenT[006] Illumination means that the delusory distinction between the two shores of a worldly and transcendental existence no longer holds. It is possible to awaken from one dream into another. The dreamer may dream that she has awakened. And yet still she dreams.

ZenT[007] Mind is not awareness. Learning is not the path. When the question is common, the answer is also common. No clinging, no seeking. Don't seek the truth - just drop your opinions. All teachings are mind created, therefore desire, and forms, and the formless are mind. Vast emptiness, nothing holy! Awaken the mind without fixing it anywhere.

ZenT[008] Speech is not true, neither is silence. Above speech and silence there is a way out. What is inexpressible is inexhaustible in its use. I would rather sink to the bottom of the sea for endless eons than seek liberation through all the saints of the universe. When the task is done beforehand, then it is easy. If you want to climb a mountain, begin at the top. Every day is a good day. When there's no work for a day, there's no eating for a day.

ZenT[009] When you forget the good and the non-good, the worldly life and the religious life, and all other teachings, and permit no thoughts relating to them to arise, and you are unattached to body and mind and there is nothing to be discriminated –then there is complete freedom.

ZenT[010] Under blue sky, in bright sunlight, you need not search for wisdom. Asking what wisdom is, that is like lying and saying, "I speak the truth." Like the clear stillness of autumn water–pure and without activity; in its tranquil depths are no obstructions. Such a one is called a man of the Way, also, a man who has nothing further to do.

ZenT[011] There is one thing: above, it supports Heaven; below, it upholds Earth. It is beyond description and understanding. There's nothing equal to wearing clothes and eating food. Outside this there are neither wise nor ignorant men. It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question. Entering the forest, he moves not the grass; entering the water he makes not a ripple.

ZenT[012] Two men were arguing about a flag. The first man said, "The flag is moving." The second man said, "No, the wind is moving." The wise man said, "It is not the wind moving; it is not the flag. It is mind that is moving."

ZenT[013] Merge your mind with cosmic space, integrate your actions with myriad forms. An eternity of endless space: a day of wind and moon. Heaven and earth and I are of the same root, the ten-thousand things and I are of one substance. All things and I belong to one Whole.

ZenT[014] Before awakening, I saw mountains as mountains, and rivers as rivers. When I awakened, I saw that mountains are not mountains, and rivers are not rivers. Now awake, I see that mountains are mountains, and rivers are rivers.

ZenT[015] A student was studying with his teacher. He asked many questions which the teacher answered. Finally, the teacher said, "It is late, you should sleep." The student began to go out and said, "It is very dark outside." The teacher lit a candle and handed it to the student, but as the student reached out to take it, the teacher blew the candle out. At that moment, the mind of the student was opened.

ZenT[016] The blue mountains are of themselves blue mountains; The white clouds are of themselves white clouds. Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.

ZenT[017] Misery only doth exist, none miserable; No doer is there, naught save the deed is found. Awakening is, but not the man who seeks it. The Path exists, but not the traveler on it.

ZenT[018] We eat, excrete, sleep, and get up; all we have to do after that is die.

ZenT[019] A student asked his teacher: "Is there a teaching no one has ever taught before?" The teacher said: "Yes, there is." "What is it?" asked the student. The teacher replied: "It is that which has never been taught."

ZenT[020] To learn Wisdom is to learn the self. To learn the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to become one with endless dimension, Universal Mind.

ZenT[021] On leaf and grass, awaiting the morning sun, the dew melts quickly away. Haste thee not autumn wind that dost now stir in the fields.

ZenT[022] The mind is an organ of thought and objects are set against it: The two are like marks on the surface of the mirror; When the dirt is removed, the light begins to shine. Both mind and objects being forgotten, Ultimate Nature reveals itself.

ZenT[023] The wise man knows nothing about time or space. His life is self-natured and self-sufficient. He asks for nothing outside of his own being. The world is the exercise of his mind. When his mind starts to think, the world starts to move. The world has never been made nor has an end been put to it.

ZenT[024] If he speaks, he is lost. If he does not speak, he is lost. If he speaks or if he does not speak, he is far from the truth.

ZenT[025] Here rules an absolute quietness, all doings subside; Just a touch, and lo, a roaring thunderclap! A noise that shakes the earth, and all silence; The skull is broken to pieces, and I awaken from the dream!

ZenT[026] Long seeking it through others, I was far from reaching it. Now I go by myself and meet it everywhere. It is just I myself, and I am not itself. Understanding this way, I can be as I am.

ZenT[027] Consciousness, which sometimes presumes to believe that there is no such thing as a miracle, is itself a miracle.

ZenT[028] The celestial radiance undimmed, the norm lasting for ever more; for him who enters this gate, no reasoning, no learning.

ZenT[029] When alive, one sits without lying down: when dead, one lies down without sitting up. In both cases, flesh and bones. What has it to do with the great lesson of life?

ZenT[030] The Mystery is in actuality hard to describe. If you get the idea, you must forget the words. This is the simple way to approach the Path. All phenomena are clearly comprehended in one sentence.

ZenT[031] Others are revolted, I am unmoved. Gripped by desires, I am unmoved. Hearing the wisdom of sages, I am unmoved. I move only in my own way.

ZenT[032] The teacher said, "Express the truth without speaking. Show the truth with silence."

ZenT[033] Dwell! You are Light itself. Rely on yourself, do not rely on others. Wisdom is the Light, rely on Wisdom. Do not rely on anything other than Wisdom.

ZenT[034] Enlightenment is the art of seeing into the nature of one's own being with absolute honesty.

ZenT[035] Seekers sit peacefully among the trees, ridding themselves of illusion with a calm mind. Quietly realizing enlightenment, they experience a joy that is beyond that of heaven. Ignorant men seek fame and profit, or fine clothes, houses, and treasures. Though the joy in getting them is only fleeting, they are untiring in their quest. Seekers, however, need only simple things, their daily actions being one with the Way. With their new wisdom they know the essence of the Law. Gathering all together to listen to the countless wise teachings, They leave behind the world of illusion.

ZenT[036] As the pines grew old and the clouds idled he found boundless contentment within himself. The shadows fall on the ground but no dust is stirred: the moonlight penetrates deep in the bottom of the pool, but no trace is left in the water.

ZenT[037] Be thoroughly non-attached. Then the pine is green and the snow is white.

ZenT[038] As the night deepens, the moon brightens over the ocean. The reflection is found in every wave. Looking for the moon, it is here in this wave and the next.

ZenT[039] A student asked: "What is the path?" The wise man said: "Everyday life is the path." The student asked: "Can it be studied?" The wise man said: "If you try to study, you will be far away from it." The student asked: "If I do not study, how can I know it is the path?" The wise man said: "The path does not belong to the perception world, neither does it belong to the nonperception world. Cognition is a delusion and noncognition is senseless. If you want to reach the true path beyond doubt, place yourself in the same freedom as sky. You name it neither good nor not-good." At these words the student was enlightened.

ZenT[040] What you search for cannot be grasped. Like water resting in the hollow of your palm, when you close your fingers it is gone.

ZenT[041] We stumble and fall constantly even when we are most enlightened. But when we are in true spiritual darkness, we do not even know that we have fallen.

ZenT[042] The spring mountains are covered by layers of color, And the spring streams are laden with reflected images. Stand not judging between heaven and earth, and you will know an infinity of being.

ZenT[043] The student asked, "Why does the enlightened man not stand up and explain himself?" The teacher replied, "That which is to be explained cannot be described; words are too thick, too clumsy, too imprecise to explain what you wish to be explained. What is required is not knowledge but knowing. What is required is understanding. Words require thinking and thinking is not understanding and knowledge is not knowing.

ZenT[044] Once, I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither. I was happy to be a butterfly, unaware that I was myself. When I awakened, I was myself again. Now I do not know if I was a man, dreaming I was a butterfly, or if I am a butterfly, dreaming I am a man.

ZenT[045] There is a bright pearl within me, buried for a long time under dust. Today, the dust is gone and the light radiates, shining through all the mountains and rivers.

ZenT[046] The body is the tree of wisdom, wisdom never had a tree. The mind is a bright mirror in its stand, the bright mirror lacks a stand. At all times take care to keep it polished. Fundamentally there is not a single thing– never let the dust and grime collect! Where could the dust and grime collect?

ZenT[047] Holding without grasping, having without possessing, acting without expectations, that is wisdom.

ZenT[048] Birth is also before birth, death is also before death. If you have attained no-mind, naturally there will be nothing left.

ZenT[049] Great mountains, rivers and seas, heaven and earth, sun and moon. Who says there is no birth and death? For even these meet their end.

ZenT[050] A student came to a teacher: "I have just come here. Please teach me." The teacher asked: "Have you eaten your meal?" The student replied: "I have eaten." The teacher said: "Then you had better wash your bowl." At that moment the student was enlightened.

ZenT[051] In a moonlit night on a spring day, the croak of a frog pierces through the whole cosmos. Suddenly all is One!

ZenT[052] Look at the lake in front of the gate. When the sun shines, it radiates light and brightness, When the wind comes, there arise ripples and waves. There is a time for peaceful contemplation; there is a time for dynamic action; and all the time the lake remains itself.

ZenT[053] Suddenly all is gone, no need of plan or cure; Every action is the way, my spirit is not downcast, I leave no tracks behind me, Enlightenment is beyond speech and gesture. Those who are free cannot describe it.

ZenT[054] For a peaceful meditation, we need not to go to the mountains and streams. When thoughts are quieted down, every breath is cool and refreshing. At the bottom of the psyche is simply World. The wise man requires nothing in the world. All is empty with him, even a seat he has not, for absolute Emptiness reigns in his household. How empty indeed it is with no treasures! When the sun is risen, he walks through Emptiness, When the sun sets, he sleeps in Emptiness. Sitting in Emptiness he sings his empty songs, and his empty songs reverberate through Emptiness. Be not surprised at Emptiness so thoroughly empty, for Emptiness is the fruit of all teachings. And Emptiness is not understood by the men of the world, but Emptiness is the real treasure. I sit quietly… One day of rapture, all things are forgotten. Not that mind is stopped and thoughts are put away, but that there is nothing to disturb my serenity.

ZenT[055] I eat, I drink. I pass my time as it comes; Looking down at the stream, looking up at the mountains, How serene and relaxed I feel indeed! Perform the action and then step back. That is peace.

ZenT[056] It is impossible to exist without affecting the World in positive and negative ways. That is the nature of existence. It is up to each of us to make our way doing the most good and the least harm that we can.

ZenT[057] A bird in a secluded grove sings like a flute. Willows sway gracefully with their golden threads. The mountain valley grows the quieter as the clouds return. A breeze brings along the fragrance of the apricot flowers. For a whole day I have sat here encompassed by peace, till my mind is cleansed in and out of all cares and idle thoughts. I wish to tell you how I feel, but words fail me. If you come to this grove, we can compare notes.

ZenT[058] The wind traverses the vast sky, clouds emerge from the mountains; Feelings of enlightenment and things of the world are of no concern at all.

ZenT[059] The good is like water. It nourishes all things without trying. It is content with low places. I stroll along the stream up to where it ends. I sit down watching the clouds as they begin to rise. This is where peace begins.

ZenT[060] Ego is the Self setting itself apart.

ZenT[061] A farmer's horse ran away. The villagers said, "What terrible news, you lost your horse!" But the farmer said, "Maybe good news, maybe bad." The next day, his horse returned with 9 wild horses. The villagers said, "How lucky, now you have 10 horses!", and the farmer said, "Maybe good news, maybe bad." While training the wild horses, the farmer's son broke his leg. The villagers said, "How terrible! Now your son is injured!" The farmer said, "maybe good news, maybe bad." The next day, the army came and conscripted all the young men except the farmer's son, due to his injury. The villagers said, "You are lucky! You still have your son!" And the farmer said, "Maybe good news, maybe bad."

ZenT[062] Something there is, prior to heaven and earth, without form, without sound, all alone by itself. It has the power to control all the changing things; yet it changes not in the course of the four seasons. Empty-handed I go and yet the spade is in my hands; I walk on foot, and yet on the back of an ox I am riding. When I pass over the bridge, the water does not flow, nor the bridge.

ZenT[063] Is an enlightened man subject to the law of causation? If you say yes, then you are embracing absolutes. If you say no, then you are also embracing absolutes. An enlightened man neither is or is not subject to the law of causation. How can this be?

ZenT[064] A wise man and his followers were on a boat. As they floated past a mountain, the wise man said, "Is the mountain moving, or the boat?" And one of the followers said, "The mountain does not move. Nor the boat. Only mind is moving."

ZenT[065] The Way is without form or opposite; it is both empty and unmoving, it is not within the flow of birth and death; the world or form or formlessness does not contain it, it is not within past, future, or present.

ZenT[066] A man said, "I am a poor man and have nothing." The teacher said, "You have Awareness and Consciousness, you have sensations and the breath in your body, you can see the sunlight in the day and the stars at night, you can hear birds singing and wind blowing and music and speech, and yet you say you have nothing. You are indeed a very poor man."

ZenT[067] Spring comes with its flowers, autumn with the moon, summer with breezes, winter with snow; free your mind of idle thoughts, and you will have the best days of your life. I cannot command this universal order, but I can be at one with it, for I am of it. All that you have achieved will perish or be corrupted in the end; therefore, become that which you are.

ZenT[068] The past is already past. Don't try to regain it. The present does not stay. Don't try to touch it. Live from moment to moment. The future has not come; don't think about it beforehand. Whatever comes to the eye, leave it be. There are no commandments to be kept; there's no filth to be cleansed. With empty mind really penetrated, the teachings have no life. When you can be like this, you have completed the ultimate attainment.

ZenT[069] If you wish to penetrate the nature of all things, then you only need to thoroughly understand one thing. It is better to realize mind than body. When mind is realized one need not worry about body. When mind and body become one the man is free. Then he desires no praising.

ZenT[070] Food and clothes sustain body and life; I advise you to learn being as is. When it's time, I move my house and go, and there's nothing to be left behind. The individual who has to justify his existence by his own efforts is in eternal bondage to himself.

ZenT[071] When the mind is at peace, the world too is at peace. Not holding on to reality, not getting stuck in the void, you are neither holy or wise, just an ordinary fellow who has completed his work.

ZenT[072] Well versed in the Way, I go the non-Way, without abandoning my ordinary person's affairs. The conditioned and name-and-form, all are flowers in the sky. Nameless and formless, I leave birth-and-death.

ZenT[073] If there is to be any peace it will come through being, not having. The student asked the teacher, "Who is he that is independent of all things?" The teacher said, "When you have drunk all the water in the river, I will tell you." At this, the student underwent his great experience.

ZenT[074] Out of nowhere, the mind comes forth.

ZenT[075] Can an animal be awakened? An insect? A blade of grass? This is a serious question. If you say yes or no, then you are sleeping.

ZenT[076] How wondrously supernatural, And how miraculous this! I draw water, and I chop wood.

ZenT[077] The finger that points at the moon is not the moon.

ZenT[078] When the student is ready, the teacher appears.

ZenT[079] A wild goose flies over the lake; the water reflects its passing, yet leaves no trace.

ZenT[080] Do not seek the truth, only cease to cherish opinions.

4.3 The Enchiridion

1. Most things are beyond your control.

Ench[001] 1: Of things some are in our power, and others are not. In our power are opinion ([Greek: hupolaepsis]), movement towards a thing ([Greek: hormae]), desire, aversion ([Greek: echchlisis]), turning from a thing; and in a word, whatever are our acts. Not in our power are the body, property, reputation, offices (magisterial power), and in a word, whatever are not our own acts. And the things in our power are by nature free, not subject to restraint or hindrance; but the things not in our power are weak, slavish, subject to restraint, in the power of others. Remember then, that if you think the things which are by nature slavish to be free, and the things which are in the power of others to be your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will blame both gods and men; but if you think that only which is your own to be your own, and if you think that what is another's, as it really is, belongs to another, no man will ever compel you, no man will hinder you, you will never blame any man, you will accuse no man, you will do nothing involuntarily (against your will), no man will harm you, you will have no enemy, for you will not suffer any harm. If then you desire (aim at) such great things remember that you must not (attempt to) lay hold of them with a small effort; but you must leave alone some things entirely, and postpone others for the present. But if you wish for these things also (such great things), and power (office) and wealth, perhaps you will not gain even these very things (power and wealth) because you aim also at those former things (such great things); certainly you will fail in those things through which alone happiness and freedom are secured. Straightway then practise saying to every harsh appearance: You are an appearance, and in no manner what you appear to be. Then examine it by the rules which you possess, and by this first and chiefly, whether it relates to the things which are in our power or to things which are not in our power; and if it relates to anything which is not in our power, be ready to say that it does not concern you.

2. Let go of desire, whether to get something or to avoid something.

Ench[002] 2: Remember that desire contains in it the profession (hope) of obtaining that which you desire; and the profession (hope) in aversion (turning from a thing) is that you will not fall into that which you attempt to avoid; and he who fails in his desire is unfortunate; and he who falls into that which he would avoid is unhappy. If then you attempt to avoid only the things contrary to nature which are within your power you will not be involved in any of the things which you would avoid. But if you attempt to avoid disease, or death, or poverty, you will be unhappy. Take away then aversion from all things which are not in our power, and transfer it to the things contrary to nature which are in our power. But destroy desire completely for the present. For if you desire anything which is not in our power, you must be unfortunate; but of the things in our power, and which it would be good to desire, nothing yet is before you. But employ only the power of moving towards an object and retiring from it; and these powers indeed only slightly and with exceptions and with remission.

3. Everything is temporary.
Ench[003] 3: In everything which pleases the soul, or supplies a want, or is loved, remember to add this to the (description, notion): What is the nature of each thing, beginning from the smallest? If you love an earthen vessel, say it is an earthen vessel which you love; for when it has been broken you will not be disturbed. If you are kissing your child or wife, say that it is a human being whom you are kissing, for when the wife or child dies you will not be disturbed.

4. Be mindful in all things.
Ench[004] 4: When you are going to take in hand any act remind yourself what kind of an act it is. If you are going to bathe, place before yourself what happens in the bath; some splashing the water, others pushing against one another, others abusing one another, and some stealing; and thus with more safety you will undertake the matter, if you say to yourself, I now intend to bathe, and to maintain my will in a manner conformable to nature. And so you will do in every act; for thus if any hindrance to bathing shall happen let this thought be ready. It was not this only that I intended, but I intended also to maintain my will in a way conformable to nature; but I shall not maintain it so if I am vexed at what happens.

5. Accept everything that happens. Blame no one, not even yourself.
Ench[005] 5: Men are disturbed not by the things which happen, but by their opinions about the things; for example, death is nothing terrible, for if it were it would have seemed so to Socrates; for the opinion about death that it is terrible, is the terrible thing. When then we are impeded, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never blame others, but ourselves--that is, our opinions. It is the act of an ill-instructed man to blame others for his own bad condition; it is the act of one who has begun to be instructed, to lay the blame on himself; and of one whose instruction is completed, neither to blame another, nor himself.

6. Do not accept undue praise.
Ench[006] 6: Be not elated at any advantage (excellence) which belongs to another. If a horse when he is elated should say, I am beautiful, one might endure it. But when you are elated, and say, I have a beautiful horse, you must know that you are elated at having a good horse. What then is your own? The use of appearances. Consequently when in the use of appearances you are conformable to nature, then be elated, for then you will be elated at something good which is your own.

7. Enjoy your life, but be responsible in your actions.
Ench[007] 7: As on a voyage when the vessel has reached a port, if you go out to get water it is an amusement by the way to pick up a shellfish or some bulb, but your thoughts ought to be directed to the ship, and you ought to be constantly watching if the captain should call, and then you must throw away all those things, that you may not be bound and pitched into the ship like sheep. So in life also, if there be given to you instead of a little bulb and a shell a wife and child, there will be nothing to prevent (you from taking them). But if the captain should call, run to the ship and leave all those things without regard to them. But if you are old, do not even go far from the ship, lest when you are called you make default.

8. Do not wish for any event except those events that occur.
Ench[008] 8: Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish; but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life.

9. Your body is not your mind; be strong of will.
Ench[009] 9: Disease is an impediment to the body, but not to the will, unless the will itself chooses. Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to the will. And add this reflection on the occasion of everything that happens; for you will find it an impediment to something else, but not to yourself.

10. Every obstacle is an opportunity for growth.
Ench[010] 10: On the occasion of every accident (event) that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have for turning it to use. If you see a fair man or a fair woman, you will find that the power to resist is temperance (continence). If labor (pain) be presented to you, you will find that it is endurance. If it be abusive words, you will find it to be patience. And if you have been thus formed to the (proper) habit, the appearances will not carry you along with them.

11. Since nothing is yours, you can never lose it.
Ench[011] 11: Never say about anything, I have lost it, but say I have restored it. Is your child dead? It has been restored. Is your wife dead? She has been restored. Has your estate been taken from you? Has not then this also been restored? But he who has taken it from me is a bad man. But what is it to you, by whose hands the giver demanded it back? So long as he may allow you, take care of it as a thing which belongs to another, as travellers do with their inn.

12. Do not be disturbed by small matters.
Ench[012] 12: If you intend to improve, throw away such thoughts as these: if I neglect my affairs, I shall not have the means of living: unless I chastise my slave, he will be bad. For it is better to die of hunger and so to be released from grief and fear than to live in abundance with perturbation; and it is better for your slave to be bad than for you to be unhappy. Begin then from little things. Is the oil spilled? Is a little wine stolen? Say on the occasion, at such price is sold freedom from perturbation; at such price is sold tranquillity, but nothing is got for nothing. And when you call your slave, consider that it is possible that he does not hear; and if he does hear, that he will do nothing which you wish. But matters are not so well with him, but altogether well with you, that it should be in his power for you to be not disturbed.

13. Cultivate humility and acceptance.
Ench[013] 13: If you would improve, submit to be considered without sense and foolish with respect to externals. Wish to be considered to know nothing; and if you shall seem to some to be a person of importance, distrust yourself. For you should know that it is not easy both to keep your will in a condition conformable to nature and (to secure) external things: but if a man is careful about the one, it is an absolute necessity that he will neglect the other.

14. Have no expectations or desires.

Ench[014] 14: If you would have your children and your wife and your friends to live for ever, you are silly; for you would have the things which are not in your power to be in your power, and the things which belong to others to be yours. So if you would have your slave to be free from faults, you are a fool; for you would have badness not to be badness, but something else. But if you wish not to fail in your desires, you are able to do that. Practice then this which you are able to do. He is the master of every man who has the power over the things which another person wishes or does not wish, the power to confer them on him or to take them away. Whoever then wishes to be free let him neither wish for anything nor avoid anything which depends on others: if he does not observe this rule, he must be a slave.

15. Take what comes to you and be content.

Ench[015] 15: Remember that in life you ought to behave as at a banquet. Suppose that something is carried round and is opposite to you. Stretch out your hand and take a portion with decency. Suppose that it passes by you. Do not detain it. Suppose that it is not yet come to you. Do not send your desire forward to it, but wait till it is opposite to you. Do so with respect to children, so with respect to a wife, so with respect to magisterial offices, so with respect to wealth, and you will be some time a worthy partner of the banquets of the gods. But if you take none of the things which are set before you, and even despise them, then you will be not only a fellow banqueter with the gods, but also a partner with them in power. For by acting thus Diogenes and Heracleitus and those like them were deservedly divine, and were so called.

16. Comfort others, but know for yourself that grief is a point of view.

Ench[016] 16: When you see a person weeping in sorrow either when a child goes abroad or when he is dead, or when the man has lost his property, take care that the appearance do not hurry you away with it, as if he were suffering in external things. But straightway make a distinction in your own mind, and be in readiness to say, it is not that which has happened that afflicts this man, for it does not afflict another, but it is the opinion about this thing which afflicts the man. So far as words then do not be unwilling to show him sympathy, and even if it happens so, to lament with him. But take care that you do not lament internally also.

17. Be your authentic self to the best of your ability.

Ench[017] 17: Remember that thou art an actor in a play, of such a kind as the teacher (author) may choose; if short, of a short one; if long, of a long one: if he wishes you to act the part of a poor man, see that you act the part naturally; if the part of a lame man, of a magistrate, of a private person, (do the same). For this is your duty, to act well the part that is given to you; but to select the part, belongs to another.

18. All omens are good if you choose to view them as such.

Ench[018] 18: When a raven has croaked inauspiciously, let not the appearance hurry you away with it; but straightway make a distinction in your mind and say, None of these things is signified to me, but either to my poor body, or to my small property, or to my reputation, or to my children, or to my wife: but to me all significations are auspicious if I choose. For whatever of these things results, it is in my power to derive benefit from it.

19. Know what is in your power, and work for that.

Ench[019] 19: You can be invincible, if you enter into no contest in which it is not in your power to conquer. Take care then when you observe a man honored before others or possessed of great power or highly esteemed for any reason, not to suppose him happy, and be not carried away by the appearance. For if the nature of the good is in our power, neither envy nor jealousy will have a place in us. But you yourself will not wish to be a general or senator ([Greek: prutanis]) or consul, but a free man: and there is only one way to this, to despise (care not for) the things which are not in our power.

20. You are not insulted by another's action, but by your opinion of it.

Ench[020] 20: Remember that it is not he who reviles you or strikes you, who insults you, but it is your opinion about these things as being insulting. When then a man irritates you, you must know that it is your own opinion which has irritated you. Therefore especially try not to be carried away by the appearance. For if you once gain time and delay, you will more easily master yourself.

21. Contemplate death, and you will not fear it.

Ench[021] 21: Let death and exile and every other thing which appears dreadful be daily before your eyes; but most of all death: and you will never think of anything mean nor will you desire anything extravagantly.

22. Focus on your own improvement, regardless of what people say.

Ench[022] 22: If you desire philosophy, prepare yourself from the beginning to be ridiculed, to expect that many will sneer at you, and say, He has all at once returned to us as a philosopher; and whence does he get this supercilious look for us? Do you not show a supercilious look; but hold on to the things which seem to you best as one appointed by God to this station. And remember that if you abide in the same principles, these men who first ridiculed will afterwards admire you; but if you shall have been overpowered by them, you will bring on yourself double ridicule.

23. Do not try to please others, but be true to your values.

Ench[023] 23: If it should ever happen to you to be turned to externals in order to please some person, you must know that you have lost your purpose in life. Be satisfied then in everything with being a philosopher; and if you wish to seem also to any person to be a philosopher, appear so to yourself, and you will be able to do this.

24. Live your life as best you can, and let other people live theirs.

Ench[024] 24: Let not these thoughts afflict you, I shall live unhonored and be nobody nowhere. For if want of honor ([Greek: atimia]) is an evil, you cannot be in evil through the means (fault) of another any more than you can be involved in anything base. Is it then your business to obtain the rank of a magistrate, or to be received at a banquet? By no means. How then can this be want of honor (dishonor)? And how will you be nobody nowhere, when you ought to be somebody in those things only which are in your power, in which indeed it is permitted to you to be a man of the greatest worth? But your friends will be without assistance! What do you mean by being without assistance? They will not receive money from you, nor will you make them Roman citizens. Who then told you that these are among the things which are in our power, and not in the power of others? And who can give to another what he has not himself? Acquire money then, your friends say, that we also may have something.

If I can acquire money and also keep myself modest and faithful and magnanimous, point out the way, and I will acquire it. But if you ask me to lose the things which are good and my own, in order that you may gain the things which are not good, see how unfair and silly you are. Besides, which would you rather have, money or a faithful and modest friend? For this end then rather help me to be such a man, and do not ask me to do this by which I shall lose that character. But my country, you say, as far as it depends on me, will be without my help. I ask again, what help do you mean? It will not have porticos or baths through you. And what does this mean? For it is not furnished with shoes by means of a smith, nor with arms by means of a shoemaker. But it is enough if every man fully discharges the work that is his own: and if you provided it with another citizen faithful and modest, would you not be useful to it? Yes. Then you also cannot be useless to it. What place then, you say, shall I hold in the city? Whatever you can, if you maintain at the same time your fidelity and modesty. But if when you wish to be useful to the state, you shall lose these qualities, what profit could you be to it, if you were made shameless and faithless?

25. Do not envy others, but work to improve yourself.

Ench[025] 25: Has any man been preferred before you at a banquet, or in being saluted, or in being invited to a consultation? If these things are good, you ought to rejoice that he has obtained them; but if bad, be not grieved because you have not obtained them. And remember that you cannot, if you do not the same things in order to obtain what is not in our own power, be considered worthy of the same (equal) things. For how can a man obtain an equal share with another when he does not visit a man's doors as that other man does; when he does not attend him when he goes abroad, as the other man does; when he does not praise (flatter) him as another does? You will be unjust then and insatiable, if you do not part with the price, in return for which those things are sold, and if you wish to obtain them for nothing. Well, what is the price of lettuces? An obolus perhaps. If then a man gives up the obolus, and receives the lettuces, and if you do not give up the obolus and do not obtain the lettuces, do not suppose that you receive less than he who has got the lettuces; for as he has the lettuces, so you have the obolus which you did not give. In the same way then in the other matter also you have not been invited to a man's feast, for you did not give to the host the price at which the supper is sold; but he sells it for praise (flattery), he sells it for personal attention. Give then the price, if it is for your interest, for which it is sold. But if you wish both not to give the price and to obtain the things, you are insatiable and silly. Have you nothing then in place of the supper? You have indeed, you have the not flattering of him, whom you did not choose to flatter; you have the not enduring of the man when he enters the room.

26. Accept loss with detachment, like it happened to someone else.

Ench[026] 26: We may learn the wish (will) of nature from the things in which we do not differ from one another: for instance, when your neighbor's slave has broken his cup, or anything else, we are ready to say forthwith, that it is one of the things which happen. You must know then that when your cup also is broken, you ought to think as you did when your neighbor's cup was broken. Transfer this reflection to greater things also. Is another man's child or wife dead? There is no one who would not say, This is an accident. But when a man's own child or wife is dead, forthwith he calls out, Woe to me, how wretched I am! But we ought to remember how we feel when we hear that it has happened to others.

27. Just as no one misses a target on purpose, no one created evil.
Ench[027] 27: As a mark is not set up for the purpose of missing the aim, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world.

28. Do not be disturbed or troubled by the actions of another.
Ench[028] 28: If any person was intending to put your body in the power of any man whom you fell in with on the way, you would be vexed; but that you put your understanding in the power of any man whom you meet, so that if he should revile you, it is disturbed and troubled, are you not ashamed at this?

29. Consider carefully the requirements to reach your goal.
Ench[029] 29: In every act observe the things which come first, and those which follow it; and so proceed to the act. If you do not, at first you will approach it with alacrity, without having thought of the things which will follow; but afterwards, when certain base (ugly) things have shown themselves, you will be ashamed. A man wishes to conquer at the Olympic games. I also wish indeed, for it is a fine thing. But observe both the things which come first, and the things which follow; and then begin the act. You must do everything according to rule, eat according to strict orders, abstain from delicacies, exercise yourself as you are bid at appointed times, in heat, in cold, you must not drink cold water, nor wine as you choose; in a word, you must deliver yourself up to the exercise master as you do to the physician, and then proceed to the contest. And sometimes you will strain the hand, put the ankle out of joint, swallow much dust, sometimes be flogged, and after all this be defeated. When you have considered all this, if you still choose, go to the contest: if you do not you will behave like children, who at one time play at wrestlers, another time as flute players, again as gladiators, then as trumpeters, then as tragic actors. So you also will be at one time an athlete, at another a gladiator, then a rhetorician, then a philosopher, but with your whole soul you will be nothing at all; but like an ape you imitate everything that you see, and one thing after another pleases you. For you have not undertaken anything with consideration, nor have you surveyed it well; but carelessly and with cold desire. Thus some who have seen a philosopher and having heard one speak, as Euphrates speaks--and who can speak as he does?--they wish to be philosophers themselves also. My man, first of all consider what kind of thing it is; and then examine your own nature, if you are able to sustain the character. Do you wish to be a pentathlete or a wrestler? Look at your arms, your thighs, examine your loins. For different men are formed by nature for different things. Do you think that if you do these things, you can eat in the same manner, drink in the same manner, and in the same manner loathe certain things? You must pass sleepless nights, endure toil, go away from your kinsmen, be despised by a slave, in everything have the inferior part, in honor, in office, in the courts of justice, in every little matter. Consider these things, if you would exchange for them, freedom from passions, liberty, tranquillity. If not, take care that, like little children, you be not now a philosopher, then a servant of the publicani, then a rhetorician, then a procurator (manager) for Cæsar. These things are not consistent. You must be one man, either good or bad. You must either cultivate your own ruling faculty, or external things. You must either exercise your skill on internal things or on external things; that is you must either maintain the position of a philosopher or that of a common person.

30. Always do the right thing by others, even if they do not, to you.

Ench[030] 30: Duties are universally measured by relations ([Greek: tais schsesi]). Is a man a father? The precept is to take care of him, to yield to him in all things, to submit when he is reproachful, when he inflicts blows. But suppose that he is a bad father. Were you then by nature made akin to a good father? No; but to a father. Does a brother wrong you? Maintain then your own position towards him, and do not examine what he is doing, but what you must do that your will shall be conformable to nature. For another will not damage you, unless you choose: but you will be damaged then when you shall think that you are damaged. In this way then you will discover your duty from the relation of a neighbor, from that of a citizen, from that of a general, if you are accustomed to contemplate the relations.

31. Be pious and spiritual, and act rightly in all things.

Ench[031] 31: As to piety towards the gods you must know that this is the chief thing, to have right opinions about them, to think that they exist, and that they administer the All well and justly; and you must fix yourself in this principle (duty), to obey them, and to yield to them in everything which happens, and voluntarily to follow it as being accomplished by the wisest intelligence. For if you do so, you will never either blame the gods, nor will you accuse them of neglecting you. And it is not possible for this to be done in any other way than by withdrawing from the things which are not in our power, and by placing the good and the evil only in those things which are in our power. For if you think that any of the things which are not in our power is good or bad, it is absolutely necessary that, when you do not obtain what you wish, and when you fall into those things which you do not wish, you will find fault and hate those who are the cause of them; for every animal is formed by nature to this, to fly from and to turn from the things which appear harmful and the things which are the cause of the harm, but to follow and admire the things which are useful and the causes of the useful. It is impossible then for a person who thinks that he is harmed to be delighted with that which he thinks to be the cause of the harm, as it is also impossible to be pleased with the harm itself. For this reason also a father is reviled by his son, when he gives no part to his son of the things which are considered to be good; and it was this which made Polynices and Eteocles enemies, the opinion that royal power was a good. It is for this reason that the cultivator of the earth reviles the gods, for this reason the sailor does, and the merchant, and for this reason those who lose their wives and their children. For where your interest is, there also piety is. Consequently he who takes care to desire as he ought and to avoid ([Greek: echchlinein]) as he ought, at the same time also cares after piety. But to make libations and to sacrifice and to offer first-fruits according to the custom of our fathers, purely and not meanly nor carelessly nor scantily nor above our ability, is a thing which belongs to all to do.

32. Consider the future with neither desire nor aversion.

Ench[032] 32: When you have recourse to divination, remember that you do not know how it will turn out, but that you are come to inquire from the diviner. But of what kind it is, you know when you come, if indeed you are a philosopher. For if it is any of the things which are not in our power, it is absolutely necessary that it must be neither good nor bad. Do not then bring to the diviner desire or aversion ([Greek: echchlinein]): if you do, you will approach him with fear.

But having determined in your mind that everything which shall turn out (result) is indifferent, and does not concern you, and whatever it may be, for it will be in your power to use it well, and no man will hinder this, come then with confidence to the gods as your advisers. And then when any advice shall have been given, remember whom you have taken as advisers, and whom you will have neglected, if you do not obey them. And go to divination, as Socrates said that you ought, about those matters in which all the inquiry has reference to the result, and in which means are not given either by reason nor by any other art for knowing the thing which is the subject of the inquiry. Wherefore when we ought to share a friend's danger, or that of our country, you must not consult the diviner whether you ought to share it. For even if the diviner shall tell you that the signs of the victims are unlucky, it is plain that this is a token of death, or mutilation of part of the body, or of exile. But reason prevails, that even with these risks, we should share the dangers of our friend, and of our country. Therefore attend to the greater diviner, the Pythian god, who ejected from the temple him who did not assist his friend, when he was being murdered.

33. Do not be vulgar, nor engage in trivial conversation.

Ench[033] 33: Immediately prescribe some character and some form to yourself, which you shall observe both when you are alone and when you meet with men. And let silence be the general rule, or let only what is necessary be said, and in few words. And rarely, and when the occasion calls, we shall say something; but about none of the common subjects, not about gladiators, nor horse-races, nor about athletes, nor about eating or drinking, which are the usual subjects; and especially not about men, as blaming them or praising them, or comparing them. If then you are able, bring over by your conversation, the conversation of your associates, to that which is proper; but if you should happen to be confined to the company of strangers, be silent. Let not your laughter be much, nor on many occasions, nor excessive. Refuse altogether to take an oath, if it is possible; if it is not, refuse as far as you are able. Avoid banquets which are given by strangers and by ignorant persons. But if ever there is occasion to join in them, let your attention be carefully fixed, that you slip not into the manners of the vulgar (the uninstructed). For you must know, that if your companion be impure, he also who keeps company with him must become impure, though he should happen to be pure. Take (apply) the things which relate to the body as far as the bare use, as food, drink, clothing, house, and slaves; but exclude everything which is for show or luxury. As to pleasure with women, abstain as far as you can before marriage; but if you do indulge in it, do it in the way which is conformable to custom. Do not however be disagreeable to those who indulge in these pleasures, or reprove them; and do not often boast that you do not indulge in them yourself. If a man has reported to you, that a certain person speaks ill of you, do not make any defence (answer) to what has been told you; but reply, The man did not know the rest of my faults, for he would not have mentioned these only. It is not necessary to go to the theatres often: but if there is ever a proper occasion for going, do not show yourself as being a partisan of any man except yourself, that is, desire only that to be done which is done, and for him only to gain the prize who gains the prize; for in this way you will meet with no hindrance. But abstain entirely from shouts and laughter at any (thing or person), or violent emotions. And when you are come away, do not talk much about what has passed on the stage, except about that which may lead to your own improvement. For it is plain, if you do talk much, that you admired the spectacle (more than you ought). Do not go to the hearing of certain persons' recitations, nor visit them readily.

But if you do attend, observe gravity and sedateness, and also avoid making yourself disagreeable. When you are going to meet with any person, and particularly one of those who are considered to be in a superior condition, place before yourself what Socrates or Zeno would have done in such circumstances, and you will have no difficulty in making a proper use of the occasion. When you are going to any of those who are in great power, place before yourself that you will not find the man at home, that you will be excluded, that the door will not be opened to you, that the man will not care about you. And if with all this it is your duty to visit him, bear what happens, and never say to yourself that it was not worth the trouble. For this is silly, and marks the character of a man who is offended by externals. In company take care not to speak much and excessively about your own acts or dangers; for as it is pleasant to you to make mention of your own dangers, it is not so pleasant to others to hear what has happened to you. Take care also not to provoke laughter; for this is a slippery way towards vulgar habits, and is also adapted to diminish the respect of your neighbors. It is a dangerous habit also to approach obscene talk. When then, anything of this kind happens, if there is a good opportunity, rebuke the man who has proceeded to this talk; but if there is not an opportunity, by your silence at least, and blushing and expression of dissatisfaction by your countenance, show plainly that you are displeased at such talk.

34. Defer pleasure, and do not be conquered by it.
Ench[034] 34: If you have received the impression of any pleasure, guard yourself against being carried away by it; but let the thing wait for you, and allow yourself a certain delay on your own part. Then think of both times, of the time when you will enjoy the pleasure, and of the time after the enjoyment of the pleasure, when you will repent and will reproach yourself. And set against these things how you will rejoice, if you have abstained from the pleasure, and how you will commend yourself. But if it seems to you seasonable to undertake (do) the thing, take care that the charm of it, and the pleasure, and the attraction of it shall not conquer you; but set on the other side the consideration, how much better it is to be conscious that you have gained this victory.

35. Consider your actions, and if you do a thing, do it openly.
Ench[035] 35: When you have decided that a thing ought to be done, and are doing it, never avoid being seen doing it, though the many shall form an unfavorable opinion about it. For if it is not right to do it, avoid doing the thing; but if it is right, why are you afraid of those who shall find fault wrongly?

36. Gluttony is harmful to your health and your social standing.
Ench[036] 36: As the proposition, it is either day, or it is night, is of great importance for the disjunctive argument, but for the conjunctive, is of no value, so in a symposium (entertainment) to select the larger share is of great value for the body, but for the maintenance of the social feeling is worth nothing. When, then, you are eating with another, remember, to look not only to the value for the body of the things set before you, but also to the value of the behavior towards the host which ought to be observed.

37. Be yourself.
Ench[037] 37: If you have assumed a character above your strength, you have both acted in this manner in an unbecoming way, and you have neglected that which you might have fulfilled.

38. Be as careful of your mind as you are of your body.
Ench[038] 38: In walking about, as you take care not to step on a nail, or to sprain your foot, so take care not to damage your own ruling faculty; and if we observe this rule in every act, we shall undertake this act with more security.

39. Stick to basics; keep it simple.
Ench[039] 39: The measure of possession (property) is to every man the body, as the foot is of the shoe. If then you stand on this rule (the demands of the body), you will maintain the measure; but if you pass beyond it, you must then of necessity be hurried as it were down a precipice. As also in the matter of the shoe, if you go beyond the (necessities of the) foot, the shoe is gilded, then of a purple color, then embroidered; for there is no limit to that which has once passed the true measure.

40. True worth is based not on appearance, but character.
Ench[040] 40: Women forthwith from the age of fourteen are called by the men mistresses ([Greek: churiai], dominæ). Therefore, since they see that there is nothing else that they can obtain, but only the power of lying with men, they begin to decorate themselves, and to place all their hopes in this. It is worth our while then to take care that they may know that they are valued (by men) for nothing else than appearing (being) decent and modest and discreet.

41. Do not think only of physical needs, but develop your mind first.
Ench[041] 41: It is a mark of a mean capacity to spend much time on the things which concern the body, such as much exercise, much eating, much drinking, much easing of the body, much copulation. But these things should be done as subordinate things; and let all your care be directed to the mind.

42. Disregard those who gossip or treat you badly, it is only their opinion.
Ench[042] 42: When any person treats you ill or speaks ill of you, remember that he does this or says this because he thinks that it is his duty. It is not possible then for him to follow that which seems right to you, but that which seems right to himself. Accordingly, if he is wrong in his opinion, he is the person who is hurt, for he is the person who has been deceived; for if a man shall suppose the true conjunction to be false, it is not the conjunction which is hindered, but the man who has been deceived about it. If you proceed then from these opinions, you will be mild in temper to him who reviles you; for say on each occasion, It seemed so to him.

43. Everything can be viewed in a positive or negative way.
Ench[043] 43: Everything has two handles, the one by which it may be borne, the other by which it may not. If your brother acts unjustly, do not lay hold of the act by that handle wherein he acts unjustly, for this is the handle which cannot be borne; but lay hold of the other, that he is your brother, that he was nurtured with you, and you will lay hold of the thing by that handle by which it can be borne.

44. External attributes are not evidence of superiority.
Ench[044] 44: These reasonings do not cohere: I am richer than you, therefore I am better than you; I am more eloquent than you, therefore I am better than you. On the contrary, these rather cohere: I am richer than you, therefore my possessions are greater than yours; I am more eloquent than you, therefore my speech is superior to yours. But you are neither possession nor speech.

45. Do not judge others.
Ench[045] 45: Does a man bathe quickly (early)? do not say that he bathes badly, but that he bathes quickly. Does a man drink much wine? do not say that he does this badly, but say that he drinks much. For before you shall have determined the opinion how do you know whether he is acting wrong? Thus, it will not happen to you to comprehend some appearances which are capable of being comprehended, but to assent to others.

46. Do not show off your learning or tell other people how to live.
Ench[046] 46: On no occasion call yourself a philosopher, and do not speak much among the uninstructed about theorems (philosophical rules, precepts); but do that which follows from them. For example, at a banquet do not say how a man ought to eat, but eat as you ought to eat. For remember that in this way Socrates also altogether avoided ostentation. Persons used to come to him and ask to be recommended by him to philosophers, and he used to take them to philosophers, so easily did he submit to being overlooked. Accordingly, if any conversation should arise among uninstructed persons about any theorem, generally be silent; for there is great danger that you will immediately vomit up what you have not digested. And when a man shall say to you that you know nothing, and you are not vexed, then be sure that you have begun the work (of philosophy). For even sheep do not vomit up their grass and show to the shepherds how much they have eaten; but when they have internally digested the pasture, they produce externally wool and milk. Do you also show not your theorems to the uninstructed, but show the acts which come from their digestion?

47. Do not brag on yourself, someone always has it harder.
Ench[047] 47: When at a small cost you are supplied with everything for the body, do not be proud of this; nor, if you drink water, say on every occasion, I drink water. But consider first how much more frugal the poor are than we, and how much more enduring of labor. And if you ever wish to exercise yourself in labor and endurance, do it for yourself, and not for others. Do not embrace statues; but if you are ever very thirsty, take a draught of cold water and spit it out, and tell no man.

48. A wise person is content in themselves, free of desire and opinion.
Ench[048] 48: The condition and characteristic of an uninstructed person is this: he never expects from himself profit (advantage) nor harm, but from externals. The condition and characteristic of a philosopher is this: he expects all advantage and all harm from himself. The signs (marks) of one who is making progress are these: he censures no man, he praises no man, he blames no man, he accuses no man, he says nothing about himself as if he were somebody or knew something; when he is impeded at all or hindered, he blames himself; if a man praises him he ridicules the praiser to himself; if a man censures him he makes no defence; he goes about like weak persons, being careful not to move any of the things which are placed, before they are firmly fixed; he removes all desire from himself, and he transfers aversion ([Greek: echchlisin]) to those things only of the things within our power which are contrary to nature; he employs a moderate movement towards everything; whether he is considered foolish or ignorant he cares not; and in a word he watches himself as if he were an enemy and lying in ambush.

49. Be authentic, do not be mired in the pretense of complexity.
Ench[049] 49: When a man is proud because he can understand and explain the writings of Chrysippus, say to yourself, If Chrysippus had not written obscurely, this man would have had nothing to be proud of. But what is it that I wish? To understand nature and to follow it. I inquire therefore who is the interpreter? and when I have heard that it is Chrysippus, I come to him (the interpreter). But I do not understand what is written, and therefore I seek the interpreter. And so far there is yet nothing to be proud of. But when I shall have found the interpreter, the thing that remains is to use the precepts (the lessons). This itself is the only thing to be proud of. But if I shall admire the exposition, what else have I been made unless a grammarian instead of a philosopher? except in one thing, that I am explaining Chrysippus instead of Homer. When, then, any man says to me, Read Chrysippus to me, I rather blush, when I cannot show my acts like to and consistent with his words.

50. Live well, and do not be concerned about another's opinion of you.
Ench[050] 50: Whatever things (rules) are proposed to you (for the conduct of life) abide by them, as if they were laws, as if you would be guilty of impiety if you transgressed any of them. And whatever any man shall say about you, do not attend to it; for this is no affair of yours.

51. Do not defer improving yourself, but act now.
Ench[051] 51: How long will you then still defer thinking yourself worthy of the best things, and in no matter transgressing the distinctive reason? Have you accepted the theorems (rules), which it was your duty to agree to, and have you agreed to them? what teacher then do you still expect that you defer to him the correction of yourself? You are no longer a youth, but already a full-grown man. If, then, you are negligent and slothful, and are continually making procrastination after procrastination, and proposal (intention) after proposal, and fixing day after day, after which you will attend to yourself, you will not know that you are not making improvement, but you will continue ignorant (uninstructed) both while you live and till you die. Immediately then think it right to live as a full-grown man, and one who is making proficiency, and let everything which appears to you to be the best be to you a law which must not be transgressed. And if anything laborious or pleasant or glorious or inglorious be presented to you, remember that now is the contest, now are the Olympic games, and they cannot be deferred; and that it depends on one defeat and one giving way that progress is either lost or maintained. Socrates in this way became perfect, in all things improving himself, attending to nothing except to reason. But you, though you are not yet a Socrates, ought to live as one who wishes to be a Socrates.

52. Live your values, do not waste time with questions or explanations.
Ench[052] 52: The first and most necessary place (part, [Greek: topos]) in philosophy is the use of theorems (precepts, [Greek: theoraemata]), for instance, that we must not lie; the second part is that of demonstrations, for instance, How is it proved that we ought not to lie? The third is that which is confirmatory of these two, and explanatory, for example, How is this a demonstration? For what is demonstration, what is consequence, what is contradiction, what is truth, what is falsehood? The third part (topic) is necessary on account of the second, and the second on account of the first; but the most necessary and that on which we ought to rest is the first. But we do the contrary. For we spend our time on the third topic, and all our earnestness is about it; but we entirely neglect the first. Therefore, we lie; but the demonstration that we ought not to lie we have ready to hand.

53. Choose to live in accordance with Divine Will.
Ench[053] 53: In everything (circumstance) we should hold these maxims ready to hand: Lead me, O Zeus, and thou O Destiny, The way that I am bid by you to go: To follow I am ready. If I choose not, I make myself a wretch, and still must follow. But whoso nobly yields unto necessity, we hold him wise, and skill'd in things divine. And the third also: O Crito, if so it pleases the gods, so let it be; Anytus and Melitus are able indeed to kill me, but they cannot harm me.

Excerpt from Discourses:

... with the sweat of the mind, we must do what is our duty. At the school of a philosopher you must expect to have troubles, and you must prepare yourself as if you were going to appear in the Olympic games; believe me, no small task is before you. This is the height of all struggles—divine and noble.

But you say, "Will there be no one to help me?" Surely. God is your helper. But you must do your part. You must act like a man. You must stretch yourself out, you must work hard, you must get rid of fear, of desire, of envy, of malice. You must learn the true nature of things. You must look for no one to deliver you from your own judgments, but rather understand that you are the cause of your own suffering.

When you see a man in distress, you must not say, "Misfortune has happened to him." You must rather say, "He has met with the consequence of what he judged to be good." For if we think wealth to be good, and it is taken away, we think ourselves miserable. If we judge not according to truth but according to appearances, we will live and die deceived.

The soul that is disciplined and instructed never murmurs at God, never blames Him, but bears all things nobly. And when it has been stripped of what is not its own, it says with confidence: "Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny. Wherever your decrees have placed me, I will follow without hesitation. I have learned to be content in all things, for what is good can never be taken from me."

--Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, Chapter 6, Translation by George Long

4.4 The Gospel of Matthew

1. The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus

Matt[001] 1:01 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ{Christ (Greek) and Messiah (Hebrew) both mean "Anointed One"}, the son of David, the son of Abraham. 1:02 Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Judah and his brothers. 1:03 Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron. Hezron became the father of Ram. 1:04 Ram became the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon. Nahshon became the father of Salmon. 1:05 Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse. 1:06 Jesse became the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. 1:07 Solomon became the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam became the father of Abijah. Abijah became the father of Asa. 1:08 Asa became the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat became the father of Joram. Joram became the father of Uzziah. 1:09 Uzziah became the father of Jotham. Jotham became the father of Ahaz. Ahaz became the father of Hezekiah.

Matt[002] 1:10 Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh. Manasseh became the father of Amon. Amon became the father of Josiah. 1:11 Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the exile to Babylon. 1:12 After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel. 1:13 Zerubbabel became the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim. Eliakim became the father of Azor. 1:14 Azor became the father of Sadoc. Sadoc became the father of Achim. Achim became the father of Eliud. 1:15 Eliud became the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan. Matthan became the father of Jacob. 1:16 Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus{"Jesus" means "Salvation."}, who is called Christ. 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; for after his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 1:19 Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly.

Matt[003] 1:20 But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 1:21 She shall bring forth a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins." 1:22 Now all this has happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son. They shall call his name Immanuel;" which is, being interpreted, "God with us."{Isaiah 7:14}

1:24 Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; 1:25 and didn't know her sexually until she had brought forth her firstborn son. He named him Jesus.

2. The Visit of the Wise Men

Matt[004] 2:01 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men{The word for "wise men" (magoi) can also mean teachers, scientists, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, or sorcerers.} from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 2:02 "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him." 2:03 When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 2:04 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. 2:05 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, 2:06 'You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come forth a governor, who shall shepherd my people, Israel.'"{Micah 5:2} 2:07 Then Herod secretly called the wise men, and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared. 2:08 He sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child. When you have found him, bring me word, so that I also may come and worship him." 2:09 They, having heard the king, went their way; and behold, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was.

Matt[005] 2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 2:11 They came into the house and saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 2:12 Being warned in a dream that they shouldn't return to Herod, they went back to their own country another way. 2:13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." 2:14 He arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, 2:15 and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son."{Hosea 11:1} 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent out, and killed all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under, according to the exact time which he had learned from the wise men. 2:17 Then that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 2:18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; she wouldn't be comforted, because they are no more."{Jeremiah 3 1:15} 2:19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Matt[006] 2:20 "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead." 2:21 He arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. 2:22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there. Being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee, 2:23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

3. Jesus is Baptized

Matt[007] 3:01 In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 3:02 "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! 3:03 For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord.' Make his paths straight."{Isaiah 40:3} 3:04 Now John himself wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 3:05 Then people from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. 3:06 They were baptized {or, immersed} by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. 3:07 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, {or, immersion} he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 3:08 Therefore bring forth fruit worthy of repentance! 3:09 Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

Matt[008] 3:10 "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. 3:11 I indeed baptize{or, immerse} you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.{TR and NU add 'and with fire'} 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 3:14 But John would have hindered him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" 3:15 But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him. 3:16 Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. 3:17 Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

4. The Temptation of Jesus

Matt[009] 4:01 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 4:02 When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. 4:03 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4:04 But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"{Deuteronomy 8:3} 4:05 Then the devil took him into the holy city. He set him on the pinnacle of the temple, 4:06 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge concerning you.' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don't dash your foot against a stone.'"{Psalm 9 1:11-12} 4:07 Jesus said to him, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not test the Lord, your God.'"{Deuteronomy 6:16} 4:08 Again, the devil took him to an exceedingly high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory. 4:09 He said to him, "I will give you all of these things, if you will fall down and worship me."

Matt[010] 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Get behind me,{TR and NU read 'Go away' instead of 'Get behind me'} Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"{Deuteronomy 6:13} 4:11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him. 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee. 4:13 Leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, 4:14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 4:15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, 4:16 the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, to those who sat in the region and shadow of death, to them light has dawned."{Isaiah 9:1-2} 4:17 From that time, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." 4:18 Walking by the sea of Galilee, he{TR reads 'Jesus' instead of 'he'} saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 4:19 He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men."

Matt[011] 4:20 They immediately left their nets and followed him. 4:21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them. 4:22 They immediately left the boat and their father, and followed him. 4:23 Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. 4:24 The report about him went out into all Syria. They brought to him all who were sick, afflicted with various diseases and torments, possessed with demons, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them. 4:25 Great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

Discourse I

5. The Sermon on the Mount

Matt[012] 5:01 Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. 5:02 He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, 5:03 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.{Isaiah 57:15; 6 6:2}5:04 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.{Isaiah 6 1:2; 66:10,13}

Matt[013] 5:05 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.{or, land. Psalm 3 7:11} 5:06 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. 5:07 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 5:08 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 5:09 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Matt[014] 5:10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. 5:11 Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 5:13 You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. 5:15 Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. 5:16 Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. 5:17 Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. 5:18 For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter{literally, iota} or one tiny pen stroke{or, serif} shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. 5:19 Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt[015] 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;'{Exodus 20:13} and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.' 5:22 But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause{NU omits 'without a cause'.} shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!'{'Raca' is an Aramaic insult, related to the word for 'empty' and conveying the idea of empty-headedness.}shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.{or, Hell} 5:23 If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 5:25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him in the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. 5:26 Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny.{literally, 'kodrantes'. A kodrantes was a small copper coin worth about 2 lepta (widow's mites)--not enough to buy very much of anything.} 5:27 You have heard that it was said, {TR adds 'to the ancients,'} 'You shall not commit adultery;'{Exodus 20:14} 5:28 but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. 5:29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.{or, Hell}

Matt[016] 5:30 If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.{or, Hell} 5:31 It was also said, 'Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce,'{Deuteronomy 24:1}

5:32 but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery. 5:33 Again you have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows,' 5:34 but I tell you, don't swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; 5:35 nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 5:36 Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can't make one hair white or black. 5:37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.' Whatever is more than these is of the evil one. 5:38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'{Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21} 5:39 But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Matt[017] 5:40 If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. 5:41 Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 5:42 Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away him who desires to borrow from you. 5:43 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'{Leviticus 19:18} 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, 5:45 that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

6. Teaching on Prayer and Fasting

Matt[018] 6:01 Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 6:02 Therefore when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6:03 But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does, 6:04 so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 6:05 When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. 6:06 But you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 6:07 In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. 6:08 Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him. 6:09 Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

Matt[019] 6:10 Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. 6:11 Give us today our daily bread. 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. 6:13 Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.{NU omits 'For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.'}'

6:14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 6:15 But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 6:16 Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6:17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; 6:18 so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. 6:19 Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal;

Matt[020] 6:20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; 6:21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 6:22 The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. 6:23 But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 6:24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon. 6:25 Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious for your life: what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 6:26 See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they? 6:27 Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment{literally, cubit} to his lifespan? 6:28 Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, 6:29 yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these.

Matt[021] 6:30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you of little faith? 6:31 Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' 6:32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 6:33 But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. 6:34 Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own evil is sufficient.

7. The Golden Rule and Judging Others

Matt[022] 7:01 Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. 7:02 For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. 7:03 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye? 7:04 Or how will you tell your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and behold, the beam is in your own eye? 7:05 You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. 7:06 Don't give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. 7:07 Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you.

7:08 For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. 7:09 Or who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

Matt[023] 7:10 Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent? 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! 7:12 Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets. 7:13 Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. 7:14 How{TR reads 'Because' instead of 'How'} narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it. 7:15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. 7:16 By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? 7:17 Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. 7:18 A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. 7:19 Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire.

Matt[024] 7:20 Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 7:22 Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' 7:23 Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.' 7:24 Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. 7:25 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. 7:26 Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. 7:27 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell--and great was its fall." 7:28 It happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, 7:29 for he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes.

8. Jesus Works Miracles

Matt[025] 8:01 When he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. 8:02 Behold, a leper came to him and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean." 8:03 Jesus stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, "I want to. Be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 8:04 Jesus said to him, "See that you tell nobody, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 8:05 When he came into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking him, 8:06 and saying, "Lord, my servant lies in the house paralyzed, grievously tormented." 8:07 Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8:08 The centurion answered, "Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8:09 For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and tell another, 'Come,' and he comes; and tell my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Matt[026] 8:10 When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, "Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel. 8:11 I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, 8:12 but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 8:13 Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way. Let it be done for you as you have believed." His servant was healed in that hour. 8:14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. 8:15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her. She got up and served him.{TR reads "them" instead of "him"} 8:16 When evening came, they brought to him many possessed with demons. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick; 8:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases."{Isaiah 5 3:4} 8:18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes around him, he gave the order to depart to the other side. 8:19 A scribe came, and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Matt[027] 8:20 Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 8:21 Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." 8:22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." 8:23 When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him. 8:24 Behold, a violent storm came up on the sea, so much that the boat was covered with the waves, but he was asleep. 8:25 They came to him, and woke him up, saying, "Save us, Lord! We are dying!" 8:26 He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. 8:27 The men marveled, saying, "What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" 8:28 When he came to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes,{NU reads 'Gadarenes'} two people possessed by demons met him there, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that nobody could pass that way. 8:29 Behold, they cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?'

Matt[028] 8:30 Now there was a herd of many pigs feeding far away from them. 8:31 The demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of pigs." 8:32 He said to them, "Go!" They came out, and went into the herd of pigs: and behold, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea, and died in the water. 8:33 Those who fed them fled, and went away into the city, and told everything, including what happened to those who were possessed with demons. 8:34 Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged that he would depart from their borders.

9. Jesus Heals the Sick and Calls Matthew

Matt[029] 9:01 He entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city. 9:02 Behold, they brought to him a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "Son, cheer up! Your sins are forgiven you." 9:03 Behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man blasphemes." 9:04 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 9:05 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Get up, and walk?' 9:06 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." (then he said to the paralytic), "Get up, and take up your mat, and go up to your house."

9:07 He arose and departed to his house. 9:08 But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men. 9:09 As Jesus passed by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. He said to him, "Follow me." He got up and followed him.

Matt[030] 9:10 It happened as he sat in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. 9:11 When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 9:12 When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. 9:13 But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,'{Hosea 6:6} for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. {NU omits 'to repentance'.}" 9:14 Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?" 9:15 Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 9:16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch would tear away from the garment, and a worse hole is made. 9:17 Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the skins would burst, and the wine be spilled, and the skins ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." 9:18 While he told these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." 9:19 Jesus got up and followed him, as did his disciples.

Matt[031] 9:20 Behold, a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years came behind him, and touched the fringe{or, tassel} of his garment; 9:21 for she said within herself, "If I just touch his garment, I will be made well." 9:22 But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, "Daughter, cheer up! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour. 9:23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, 9:24 he said to them, "Make room, because the girl isn't dead, but sleeping." They were ridiculing him. 9:25 But when the crowd was put out, he entered in, took her by the hand, and the girl arose. 9:26 The report of this went out into all that land. 9:27 As Jesus passed by from there, two blind men followed him, calling out and saying, "Have mercy on us, son of David!" 9:28 When he had come into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They told him, "Yes, Lord." 9:29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."

Matt[032] 9:30 Their eyes were opened. Jesus strictly charged them, saying, "See that no one knows about this." 9:31 But they went out and spread abroad his fame in all that land. 9:32 As they went out, behold, a mute man who was demon possessed was brought to him. 9:33 When the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke. The multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!" 9:34 But the Pharisees said, "By the prince of the demons, he casts out demons." 9:35 Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.

9:36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed{TR reads 'weary' instead of 'harassed'} and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. 9:37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 9:38 Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest."

Discourse II

10. Jesus Commissions the Disciples

Matt[033] 10:01 He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness. 10:02 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; 10:03 Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; Lebbaeus, whose surname was{NU omits 'Lebbaeus, whose surname was'} Thaddaeus; 10:04 Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. 10:05 Jesus sent these twelve out, and charged them, saying, "Don't go among the Gentiles, and don't enter into any city of the Samaritans. 10:06 Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 10:07 As you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' 10:08 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers{TR adds ', raise the dead'}, and cast out demons. Freely you received, so freely give. 10:09 Don't take any gold, nor silver, nor brass in your money belts.

Matt[034] 10:10 Take no bag for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the laborer is worthy of his food. 10:11 Into whatever city or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy; and stay there until you go on. 10:12 As you enter into the household, greet it. 10:13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it isn't worthy, let your peace return to you. 10:14 Whoever doesn't receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust from your feet. 10:15 Most certainly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city. 10:16 Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 10:17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you. 10:18 Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. 10:19 But when they deliver you up, don't be anxious how or what you will say, for it will be given you in that hour what you will say.

Matt[035] 10:20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. 10:21 Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. 10:22 You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved. 10:23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next, for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man has come. 10:24 A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. 10:25 It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household!

10:26 Therefore don't be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed; and hidden that will not be known. 10:27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, proclaim on the housetops. 10:28 Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.{or, Hell.} 10:29 Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarion coin{An assarion is a small coin worth one tenth of a drachma or a sixteenth of a denarius (approximately the wages of one half hour of agricultural labor).}? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will,

Matt[036] 10:30 but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 10:31 Therefore don't be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows. 10:32 Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. 10:33 But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven. 10:34 Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. 10:35 For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.10:36 A man's foes will be those of his own household.{Micah 7:6} 10:37 He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. 10:38 He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. 10:39 He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

Matt[037] 10:40 He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. 10:41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward: and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 10:42 Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward."

11. Jesus and John the Baptist

Matt[038] 11:01 It happened that when Jesus had finished directing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. 11:02 Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples 11:03 and said to him, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?" 11:04 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 11:05 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,{Isaiah 3 5:5} the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.{Isaiah 6 1:1-4} 11:06 Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me." 11:07 As these went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 11:08 But what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses. 11:09 But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet.

Matt[039] 11:10 For this is he, of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'{Malachi 3:1} 11:11 Most certainly I tell you, among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.

11:12 From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.{or, plunder it.} 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 11:14 If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come. 11:15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 11:16 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions 11:17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament.' 11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children.{NU reads 'actions' instead of 'children'}"

Matt[040] 11:20 Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they didn't repent. 11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 11:22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 11:23 You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down to Hades.{or, Hell} For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until this day. 11:24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you." 11:25 At that time, Jesus answered, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants. 11:26 Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight. 11:27 All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him. 11:28 "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

12. The Pharisees' Opposition and Jesus's Response

Matt[041] 12:01 At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 12:02 But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 12:03 But he said to them, "Haven't you read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him; 12:04 how he entered into the house of God, and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for those who were with him, but only for the priests?{1 Samuel 21:3-6} 12:05 Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? 12:06 But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. 12:07 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,'{Hosea 6:6} you would not have condemned the guiltless. 12:08 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." 12:09 He departed there, and went into their synagogue.

Matt[042] 12:10 And behold there was a man with a withered hand. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" that they might accuse him. 12:11 He said to them, "What man is there among you, who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, won't he grab on to it, and lift it out? 12:12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." 12:13 Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out; and it was restored whole, just like the other. 12:14 But the Pharisees went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him. 12:15 Jesus, perceiving that, withdrew from there. Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, 12:16 and charged them that they should not make him known: 12:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 12:18 "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit on him. He will proclaim justice to the nations. 12:19 He will not strive, nor shout; neither will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

Matt[043] 12:20 He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a smoking flax, until he leads justice to victory. 12:21 In his name, the nations will hope."{Isaiah 42:1-4} 12:22 Then one possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. 12:23 All the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the son of David?" 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons." 12:25 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 12:26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 12:27 If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 12:28 But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. 12:29 Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will plunder his house.

Matt[044] 12:30 He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. 12:31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. 12:32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come. 12:33 Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit. 12:34 You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. 12:35 The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure{TR adds 'of the heart'} brings out evil things. 12:36 I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 12:37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." 12:39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.

Matt[045] 12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 12:41 The men of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. 12:42 The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here. 12:43 But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and doesn't find it. 12:44 Then he says, "I will return into my house from which I came out," and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. 12:45 Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Even so will it be also to this evil generation." 12:46 While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to him. 12:47 One said to him, "Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to you." 12:48 But he answered him who spoke to him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" 12:49 He stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers!

12:50 For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Discourse III

13. The Parables

Matt[046] 13:01 On that day Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the seaside. 13:02 Great multitudes gathered to him, so that he entered into a boat, and sat, and all the multitude stood on the beach. 13:03 He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, "Behold, a farmer went out to sow. 13:04 As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured them. 13:05 Others fell on rocky ground, where they didn't have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of earth. 13:06 When the sun had risen, they were scorched. Because they had no root, they withered away. 13:07 Others fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them: 13:08 and others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit: some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. 13:09 He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Matt[047] 13:10 The disciples came, and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 13:11 He answered them, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. 13:12 For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. 13:13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand. 13:14 In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: 13:15 for this people's heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should turn again; and I would heal them.'{Isaiah 6:9-10} 13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.

13:17 For most certainly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see, and didn't see them; and to hear the things which you hear, and didn't hear them. 13:18 Hear, then, the parable of the farmer. 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom, and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the roadside.

Matt[048] 13:20 What was sown on the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and immediately with joy receives it; 13:21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 13:22 What was sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 13:23 What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and brings forth, some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty." 13:24 He set another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, 13:25 but while people slept, his enemy came and sowed darnel weeds{darnel is a weed grass (probably bearded darnel or lolium temulentum) that looks very much like wheat until it is mature, when the difference becomes very apparent.} also among the wheat, and went away. 13:26 But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the darnel weeds appeared also. 13:27 The servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did this darnel come from? 13:28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them up?' 13:29 But he said, 'No, lest perhaps while you gather up the darnel weeds, you root up the wheat with them.

Matt[049] 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the harvest time I will tell the reapers, "First, gather up the darnel weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."' 13:31 He set another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; 13:32 which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches." 13:33 He spoke another parable to them. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took, and hid in three measures{literally, three sata. 3 sata is about 39 litres or a bit more than a bushel} of meal, until it was all leavened." 13:34 Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the multitudes; and without a parable, he didn't speak to them, 13:35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world."{Psalm 7 8:2} 13:36 Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the darnel weeds of the field." 13:37 He answered them, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 13:38 the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom; and the darnel weeds are the children of the evil one. 13:39 The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Matt[050] 13:40 As therefore the darnel weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age. 13:41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, 13:42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth. 13:43 Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 13:44 Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. 13:45 Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls, 13:46 who having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. 13:47 Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet, that was cast into the sea, and gathered some fish of every kind, 13:48 which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach. They sat down, and gathered the good into containers, but the bad they threw away. 13:49 So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous,

Matt[051] 13:50 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." 13:51 Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They answered him, "Yes, Lord." 13:52 He said to them, "Therefore, every scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and old things." 13:53 It happened that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there. 13:54 Coming into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom, and these mighty works? 13:55 Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas{or, Judah}? 13:56 Aren't all of his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all of these things?" 13:57 They were offended by him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house." 13:58 He didn't do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

14. The Death of John the Baptist and Feeding the Multitudes

Matt[052] 14:01 At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, 14:02 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptizer. He is risen from the dead. That is why these powers work in him." 14:03 For Herod had laid hold of John, and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 14:04 For John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 14:05 When he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 14:06 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced among them and pleased Herod. 14:07 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask. 14:08 She, being prompted by her mother, said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptizer." 14:09 The king was grieved, but for the sake of his oaths, and of those who sat at the table with him, he commanded it to be given,

Matt[053] 14:10 and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. 14:11 His head was brought on a platter, and given to the young lady: and she brought it to her mother. 14:12 His disciples came, and took the body, and buried it; and they went and told Jesus. 14:13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat, to a deserted place apart. When the multitudes heard it, they followed him on foot from the cities.

14:14 Jesus went out, and he saw a great multitude. He had compassion on them, and healed their sick. 14:15 When evening had come, his disciples came to him, saying, "This place is deserted, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food." 14:16 But Jesus said to them, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat." 14:17 They told him, "We only have here five loaves and two fish." 14:18 He said, "Bring them here to me." 14:19 He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitudes.

Matt[054] 14:20 They all ate, and were filled. They took up twelve baskets full of that which remained left over from the broken pieces. 14:21 Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. 14:22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. 14:23 After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. When evening had come, he was there alone. 14:24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 14:25 In the fourth watch of the night,{The night was equally divided into four watches, so the fourth watch is approximately 3:0 A. M. to sunrise.} Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. 14:26 When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a ghost!" and they cried out for fear. 14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying "Cheer up! It is I!{or, I AM!} Don't be afraid." 14:28 Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters." 14:29 He said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus.

Matt[055] 14:30 But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 14:31 Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 14:32 When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased. 14:33 Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!" 14:34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. 14:35 When the people of that place recognized him, they sent into all that surrounding region, and brought to him all who were sick, 14:36 and they begged him that they might just touch the fringe{or, tassel} of his garment. As many as touched it were made whole.

15. Jesus Says to Follow the Spirit of the Law and Feeds 4000.

Matt[056] 15:01 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, 15:02 "Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat bread." 15:03 He answered them, "Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? 15:04 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,'{Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16} and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.'{Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9} 15:05 But you say, 'Whoever may tell his father or his mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have gotten from me is a gift devoted to God," 15:06 he shall not honor his father or mother.' You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition. 15:07 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 15:08 'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 15:09 And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.'"{Isaiah 2 9:13}

Matt[057] 15:10 He summoned the multitude, and said to them, "Hear, and understand. 15:11 That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." 15:12 Then the disciples came, and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended, when they heard this saying?" 15:13 But he answered, "Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. 15:14 Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. If the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit." 15:15 Peter answered him, "Explain the parable to us." 15:16 So Jesus said, "Do you also still not understand? 15:17 Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly, and then out of the body? 15:18 But the things which proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man. 15:19 For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies.

Matt[058] 15:20 These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile the man." 15:21 Jesus went out from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. 15:22 Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely demonized!" 15:23 But he answered her not a word. His disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away; for she cries after us." 15:24 But he answered, "I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 15:25 But she came and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, help me." 15:26 But he answered, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 15:27 But she said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 15:28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that hour. 15:29 Jesus departed there, and came near to the sea of Galilee; and he went up into the mountain, and sat there.

Matt[059] 15:30 Great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others, and they put them down at his feet. He healed them, 15:31 so that the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, injured whole, lame walking, and blind seeing--and they glorified the God of Israel. 15:32 Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away fasting, or they might faint on the way." 15:33 The disciples said to him, "Where should we get so many loaves in a deserted place as to satisfy so great a multitude?" 15:34 Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." 15:35 He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground; 15:36 and he took the seven loaves and the fish. He gave thanks and broke them, and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. 15:37 They all ate, and were filled. They took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces that were left over. 15:38 Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 15:39 Then he sent away the multitudes, got into the boat, and came into the borders of Magdala.

16. Jesus is Tested and Prophesies His Death and Resurrection

Matt[060] 16:01 The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 16:02 But he answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 16:03 In the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times! 16:04 An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah." He left them, and departed. 16:05 The disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. 16:06 Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 16:07 They reasoned among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." 16:08 Jesus, perceiving it, said, "Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith, because you have brought no bread? 16:09 Don't you yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up?

Matt[061] 16:10 Nor the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? 16:11 How is it that you don't perceive that I didn't speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 16:12 Then they understood that he didn't tell them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 16:14 They said, "Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 16:17 Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 16:18 I also tell you that you are Peter,{Peter's name, Petros in Greek, is the word for a specific rock or stone.} and on this rock{Greek, petra, a rock mass or bedrock.} I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades{or, Hell} will not prevail against it. 16:19 I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven."

Matt[062] 16:20 Then he charged the disciples that they should tell no one that he is Jesus the Christ. 16:21 From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. 16:22 Peter took him aside, and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you." 16:23 But he turned, and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men." 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. 16:26 For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds. 16:28 Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

17. The Transfiguration

Matt[063] 17:01 After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. 17:02 He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the light. 17:03 Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him. 17:04 Peter answered, and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, let's make three tents here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 17:05 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Behold, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." 17:06 When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and were very afraid. 17:07 Jesus came and touched them and said, "Get up, and don't be afraid." 17:08 Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone. 17:09 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Don't tell anyone what you saw, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

Matt[064] 17:10 His disciples asked him, saying, "Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 17:11 Jesus answered them, "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things, 17:12 but I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted to. Even so the Son of Man will also suffer by them." 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptizer. 17:14 When they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling down to him, saying, 17:15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic, and suffers grievously; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. 17:16 So I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17:17 Jesus answered, "Faithless and perverse generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to me." 17:18 Jesus rebuked him, the demon went out of him, and the boy was cured from that hour. 17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately, and said, "Why weren't we able to cast it out?"

Matt[065] 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 17:21 But this kind doesn't go out except by prayer and fasting." 17:22 While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, 17:23 and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up." They were exceedingly sorry. 17:24 When they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the didrachma coins {A didrachma is a Greek silver coin worth 2 drachmas, about as much as 2 Roman denarii, or about 2 days' wages. It was commonly used to pay the half-shekel temple tax, because 2 drachmas were worth one-half shekel of silver.} came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the didrachma?" 17:25 He said, "Yes." When he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from strangers?" 17:26 Peter said to him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "Therefore the children are exempt.

17:27 But, lest we cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up. When you have opened its mouth, you will find a stater coin. {A stater is a silver coin equivalent to four Attic or two Alexandrian drachmas, or a Jewish shekel: just exactly enough to cover the half-shekel temple tax for two people.} Take that, and give it to them for me and you."

Discourse IV

18. The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

Matt[066] 18:01 In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" 18:02 Jesus called a little child to himself, and set him in the midst of them, 18:03 and said, "Most certainly I tell you, unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. 18:04 Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. 18:05 Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me, 18:06 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea. 18:07 Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes! 18:08 If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. 18:09 If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna {or, Hell} of fire.

Matt[067] 18:10 See that you don't despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 18:11 For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost. 18:12 What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains, and seek that which has gone astray? 18:13 If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. 18:15 If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. 18:16 But if he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. {Deuteronomy 19:15} 18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly. If he refuses to hear the assembly also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. 18:18 Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in heaven. 18:19 Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.

Matt[068] 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." 18:21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?"

18:22 Jesus said to him, "I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven. 18:23 Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who wanted to reconcile accounts with his servants. 18:24 When he had begun to reconcile, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. {Ten thousand talents represents an extremely large sum of money, equivalent to about 60,0,0 denarii, where one denarius was typical of one day's wages for agricultural labor.} 18:25 But because he couldn't pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, with his wife, his children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 18:26 The servant therefore fell down and kneeled before him, saying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will repay you all!" 18:27 The lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 18:28 But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him one hundred denarii, {1 denarii was about one sixtieth of a talent.} and he grabbed him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 18:29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!'

Matt[069] 18:30 He would not, but went and cast him into prison, until he should pay back that which was due. 18:31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were exceedingly sorry, and came and told to their lord all that was done. 18:32 Then his lord called him in, and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me. 18:33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?' 18:34 His lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due to him. 18:35 So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don't each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds."

19. Teachings on Divorce and Riches

Matt[070] 19:01 It happened when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan. 19:02 Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them there. 19:03 Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?" 19:04 He answered, "Haven't you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, {Genesis 1:27} 19:05 and said, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall join to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?'{Genesis 2:24} 19:06 So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart." 19:07 They asked him, "Why then did Moses command us to give her a bill of divorce, and divorce her?" 19:08 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so. 19:09 I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery."

Matt[071] 19:10 His disciples said to him, "If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." 19:11 But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given. 19:12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it."

19:13 Then little children were brought to him, that he should lay his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 19:14 But Jesus said, "Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these." 19:15 He laid his hands on them, and departed from there. 19:16 Behold, one came to him and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" 19:17 He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." 19:18 He said to him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder.' "You shall not commit adultery." "You shall not steal." "You shall not offer false testimony." 19:19 "Honor your father and mother.'{Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20} And, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."{Leviticus 19:18}

Matt[072] 19:20 The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?" 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 19:22 But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. 19:23 Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. 19:24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." 19:25 When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" 19:26 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." 19:27 Then Peter answered, "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?" 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 19:29 Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life.

19:30 But many will be last who are first; and first who are last.

20. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard and Healing the Blind

Matt[073] 20:01 "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 20:02 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius {A denarius is a silver Roman coin worth 1/25th of a Roman aureus. This was a common wage for a day of farm labor.} a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 20:03 He went out about the third hour, {Time was measured from sunrise to sunset, so the third hour would be about 9:0 AM.} and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. 20:04 To them he said, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." So they went their way. 20:05 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, {noon and 3:0 P. M.} and did likewise. 20:06 About the eleventh hour {5:0 PM} he went out, and found others standing idle. He said to them, "Why do you stand here all day idle?" 20:07 "They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." "He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and you will receive whatever is right." 20:08 When evening had come, the lord of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning from the last to the first." 20:09 "When those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius.

Matt[074] 20:10 When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise each received a denarius. 20:11 When they received it, they murmured against the master of the household, 20:12 saying, 'These last have spent one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat!' 20:13 But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Didn't you agree with me for a denarius? 20:14 Take that which is yours, and go your way. It is my desire to give to this last just as much as to you. 20:15 Isn't it lawful for me to do what I want to with what I own? Or is your eye evil, because I am good?' 20:16 So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen." 20:17 As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way, he said to them, 20:18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, 20:19 and will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify; and the third day he will be raised up."

Matt[075] 20:20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking a certain thing of him. 20:21 He said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Command that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your Kingdom." 20:22 But Jesus answered, "You don't know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to him, "We are able." 20:23 He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father." 20:24 When the ten heard it, they were indignant with the two brothers. 20:25 But Jesus summoned them, and said, "You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 20:26 It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be {TR reads 'let him be' instead of 'shall be'} your servant. 20:27 Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your bond servant, 20:28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." 20:29 As they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

Matt[076] 20:30 Behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!" 20:31 The multitude rebuked them, telling them that they should be quiet, but they cried out even more, "Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!" 20:32 Jesus stood still, and called them, and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" 20:33 They told him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." 20:34 Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they followed him.

21. Entry into Jerusalem

Matt[077] 21:01 When they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethsphage,{TR & NU read 'Bethphage' instead of 'Bethsphage'} to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 21:02 saying to them, "Go into the village that is opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them, and bring them to me. 21:03 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and immediately he will send them." 21:04 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, 21:05 "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."{Zechariah 9:9} 21:06 The disciples went, and did just as Jesus commanded them, 21:07 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their clothes on them; and he sat on them. 21:08 A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees, and spread them on the road. 21:09 The multitudes who went before him, and who followed kept shouting, "Hosanna {'Hosanna' means 'save us' or 'help us, we pray.'} to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"{Psalm 1 18:26}

Matt[078] 21:10 When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" 21:11 The multitudes said, "This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." 21:12 Jesus entered into the temple of God, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves. 21:13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'{Isaiah 5 6:7} but you have made it a den of robbers!"{Jeremiah 7:11} 21:14 The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 21:15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children who were crying in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David!" they were indignant, 21:16 and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes. Did you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing babies you have perfected praise?'{Psalm 8:2} 21:17 He left them, and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there. 21:18 Now in the morning, as he returned to the city, he was hungry. 21:19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, "Let there be no fruit from you forever!" Immediately the fig tree withered away.

Matt[079] 21:20 When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree immediately wither away?" 21:21 Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, if you have faith, and don't doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you told this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it would be done. 21:22 All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." 21:23 When he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?" 21:24 Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. 21:25 The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?" They reasoned with themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 21:26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all hold John as a prophet."

21:27 They answered Jesus, and said, "We don't know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. 21:28 But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' 21:29 He answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind, and went.

Matt[080] 21:30 He came to the second, and said the same thing. He answered, 'I go, sir,' but he didn't go. 21:31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the Kingdom of God before you. 21:32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterward, that you might believe him. 21:33 Hear another parable. There was a man who was a master of a household, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower, leased it out to farmers, and went into another country. 21:34 When the season for the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. 21:35 The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 21:36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they treated them the same way. 21:37 But afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 21:38 But the farmers, when they saw the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and seize his inheritance.' 21:39 So they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Matt[081] 21:40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?" 21:41 They told him, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season." 21:42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvelous in our eyes?'{Psalm 1 18:22-23} 21:43 Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation bringing forth its fruit. 21:44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whoever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust." 21:45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke about them. 21:46 When they sought to seize him, they feared the multitudes, because they considered him to be a prophet.

22. The Parable of the Wedding Feast and The Greatest Commandments

Matt[082] 22:01 Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying, 22:02 "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 22:03 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come. 22:04 Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "Behold, I have made ready my dinner. My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast!"' 22:05 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, 22:06 and the rest grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 22:07 When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 22:08 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. 22:09 Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.'

Matt[083] 22:10 Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. 22:11 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, 22:12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. 22:13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness; there is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' 22:14 For many are called, but few chosen." 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how they might entrap him in his talk. 22:16 They sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are honest, and teach the way of God in truth, no matter who you teach, for you aren't partial to anyone. 22:17 Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 22:18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? 22:19 Show me the tax money." They brought to him a denarius.

Matt[084] 22:20 He asked them, "Whose is this image and inscription?" 22:21 They said to him, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22:22 When they heard it, they marveled, and left him, and went away. 22:23 On that day Sadducees (those who say that there is no resurrection) came to him. They asked him, 22:24 saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed for his brother.' 22:25 Now there were with us seven brothers. The first married and died, and having no seed left his wife to his brother. 22:26 In like manner the second also, and the third, to the seventh. 22:27 After them all, the woman died. 22:28 In the resurrection therefore, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her." 22:29 But Jesus answered them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

Matt[085] 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. 22:31 But concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 22:32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?'{Exodus 3:6} God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." 22:33 When the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. 22:34 But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. 22:35 One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. 22:36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.{Deuteronomy 6:5} 22:38 This is the first and great commandment. 22:39 A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'{Leviticus 19:18}

Matt[086] 22:40 The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." 22:41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 22:42 saying, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "Of David." 22:43 He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, 22:44 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?'{Psalm 1 10:1} 22:45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" 22:46 No one was able to answer him a word, neither did any man dare ask him any more questions from that day forth.

Discourse V

23. Jesus Denounces the Scribes and Pharisees

Matt[087] 23:01 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, 23:02 saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sat on Moses' seat. 23:03 All things therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but don't do their works; for they say, and don't do. 23:04 For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. 23:05 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries{phylacteries (tefillin in Hebrew) are small leather pouches that some Jewish men wear on their forehead and arm in prayer. They are used to carry a small scroll with some Scripture in it. See Deuteronomy 6:8.} broad, enlarge the fringes{or, tassels} of their garments, 23:06 and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 23:07 the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi, Rabbi' by men. 23:08 But don't you be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers. 23:09 Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven.

Matt[088] 23:10 Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ. 23:11 But he who is greatest among you will be your servant. 23:12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. 23:13 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. 23:14 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don't enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter.{Some Greek manuscripts reverse the order of verses 13 and 14, and some omit verse 13, numbering verse 14 as 13.} 23:15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much of a son of Gehenna{or, Hell} as yourselves. 23:16 Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' 23:17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 23:18 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obligated?' 23:19 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

Matt[089] 23:20 He therefore who swears by the altar, swears by it, and by everything on it. 23:21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who was living in it. 23:22 He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits on it. 23:23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint, dill, and cumin,{ cumin is an aromatic seed from Cuminum cyminum, resembling caraway in flavor and appearance. It is used as a spice.} and have left undone the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone. 23:24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel! 23:25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and unrighteousness.{TR reads 'self-indulgence' instead of 'unrighteousness'} 23:26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside of it may become clean also. 23:27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 23:28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 23:29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous,

Matt[090] 23:30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' 23:31 Therefore you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. 23:33 You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna{or, Hell}? 23:34 Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; 23:35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar. 23:36 Most certainly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation. 23:37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! 23:38 Behold, your house is left to you desolate. 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me from now on, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'{Psalm 1 18:26}"

Matt[091] 24:01 Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way. His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. 24:02 But he answered them, "Don't you see all of these things? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down." 24:03 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" 24:04 Jesus answered them, "Be careful that no one leads you astray. 24:05 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will lead many astray. 24:06 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen, but the end is not yet. 24:07 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places. 24:08 But all these things are the beginning of birth pains. 24:09 Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake.

24. Signs of the End of the Age

Matt[092] 24:10 Then many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. 24:11 Many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. 24:12 Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. 24:13 But he who endures to the end, the same will be saved. 24:14 This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. 24:15 "When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation,{Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11} which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 24:16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 24:17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house. 24:18 Let him who is in the field not return back to get his clothes. 24:19 But woe to those who are with child and to nursing mothers in those days!

Matt[093] 24:20 Pray that your flight will not be in the winter, nor on a Sabbath, 24:21 for then there will be great oppression, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be. 24:22 Unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved. But for the sake of the chosen ones, those days will be shortened. 24:23 "Then if any man tells you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or, 'There,' don't believe it. 24:24 For there will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones. 24:25 Behold, I have told you beforehand. 24:26 If therefore they tell you, 'Behold, he is in the wilderness,' don't go out; 'Behold, he is in the inner chambers,' don't believe it. 24:27 For as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 24:28 For wherever the carcass is, there is where the vultures{or, eagles} gather together. 24:29 But immediately after the oppression of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken;{Isaiah 13:10; 34:4}

Matt[094] 24:30 and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 24:31 He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. 24:32 Now from the fig tree learn this parable. When its branch has now become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near. 24:33 Even so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. 24:34 Most certainly I tell you, this generation{The word for 'generation' (genea) can also be translated as 'race.'} will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished. 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 24:36 But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only. 24:37 As the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 24:38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, 24:39 and they didn't know until the flood came, and took them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matt[095] 24:40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one will be left; 24:41 two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one will be left. 24:42 Watch therefore, for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes. 24:43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 24:44 Therefore also be ready, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come. 24:45 Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has set over his household, to give them their food in due season? 24:46 Blessed is that servant whom his lord finds doing so when he comes. 24:47 Most certainly I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. 24:48 But if that evil servant should say in his heart, 'My lord is delaying his coming,' 24:49 and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunkards,

Matt[096] 24:50 the lord of that servant will come in a day when he doesn't expect it, and in an hour when he doesn't know it, 24:51 and will cut him in pieces, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.

25. The Parables of the Ten Virgins, and the Talents

Matt[097] 25:01 Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. 25:02 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 25:03 Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them, 25:04 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 25:05 Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. 25:06 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!' 25:07 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.{The end of the wick of an oil lamp needs to be cut off periodically to avoid having it become clogged with carbon deposits. The wick height is also adjusted so that the flame burns evenly and gives good light without producing a lot of smoke.} 25:08 The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 25:09 But the wise answered, saying, 'What if there isn't enough for us and you? You go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

Matt[098] 25:10 While they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 25:11 Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' 25:12 But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.' 25:13 Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. 25:14 For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them. 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. 25:16 Immediately he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 25:17 In like manner he also who got the two gained another two. 25:18 But he who received the one went away and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 25:19 Now after a long time the lord of those servants came, and reconciled accounts with them.

Matt[099] 25:20 He who received the five talents came and brought another five talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents. Behold, I have gained another five talents besides them.' 25:21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 25:22 He also who got the two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents. Behold, I have gained another two talents besides them.' 25:23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 25:24 He also who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. 25:25 I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours.' 25:26 But his lord answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter. 25:27 You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest. 25:28 Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. 25:29 For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away.

Matt[100] 25:30 Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 25:31 But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 25:32 Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 25:33 He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 25:34 Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 25:35 for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; 25:36 naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.' 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? 25:38 When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 25:39 When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?'

Matt[101] 25:40 The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers{The word for 'brothers' here may be also correctly translated 'brothers and sisters' or 'siblings.'}, you did it to me.' 25:41 Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; 25:42 for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; 25:43 I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' 25:44 Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?' 25:45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' 25:46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

26. The Plot to Kill Jesus

Matt[102] 26:01 It happened, when Jesus had finished all these words, that he said to his disciples, 26:02 "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." 26:03 Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. 26:04 They took counsel together that they might take Jesus by deceit, and kill him. 26:05 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest a riot occur among the people." 26:06 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 26:07 a woman came to him having an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. 26:08 But when his disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 26:09 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor."

Matt[103] 26:10 However, knowing this, Jesus said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? Because she has done a good work for me. 26:11 For you always have the poor with you; but you don't always have me. 26:12 For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 26:13 Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her." 26:14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, 26:15 and said, "What are you willing to give me, that I should deliver him to you?" They weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver. 26:16 From that time he sought opportunity to betray him. 26:17 Now on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying to him, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 26:18 He said, "Go into the city to a certain person, and tell him The Teacher says, 'My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 26:19 The disciples did as Jesus commanded them, and they prepared the Passover.

Matt[104] 26:20 Now when evening had come, he was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. 26:21 As they were eating, he said, "Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me." 26:22 They were exceedingly sorrowful, and each began to ask him, "It isn't me, is it, Lord?" 26:23 He answered, "He who dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same will betray me. 26:24 The Son of Man goes, even as it is written of him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born." 26:25 Judas, who betrayed him, answered, "It isn't me, is it, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You said it." 26:26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for{TR reads 'blessed' instead of 'gave thanks for'} it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 26:27 He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, "All of you drink it, 26:28 for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins. 26:29 But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom. "

Matt[105] 26:30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'{Zechariah 13:7} 26:32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee." 26:33 But Peter answered him, "Even if all will be made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble."

26:34 Jesus said to him, "Most certainly I tell you that tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." 26:35 Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." All of the disciples also said likewise. 26:36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go there and pray." 26:37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled. 26:38 Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me." 26:39 He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire."

Matt[106] 26:40 He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? 26:41 Watch and pray, that you don't enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 26:42 Again, a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup can't pass away from me unless I drink it, your desire be done." 26:43 He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 26:44 He left them again, went away, and prayed a third time, saying the same words. 26:45 Then he came to his disciples, and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 26:46 Arise, let's be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand." 26:47 While he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priest and elders of the people. 26:48 Now he who betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, "Whoever I kiss, he is the one. Seize him." 26:49 Immediately he came to Jesus, and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Matt[107] 26:50 Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. 26:51 Behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. 26:52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. 26:53 Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? 26:54 How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?" 26:55 In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and you didn't arrest me. 26:56 But all this has happened, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him, and fled. 26:57 Those who had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 26:58 But Peter followed him from a distance, to the court of the high priest, and entered in and sat with the officers, to see the end. 26:59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death;

Matt[108] 26:60 and they found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward, 26:61 and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'" 26:62 The high priest stood up, and said to him, "Have you no answer? What is this that these testify against you?" 26:63 But Jesus held his peace. The high priest answered him, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."

26:64 Jesus said to him, "You have said it. Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky." 26:65 Then the high priest tore his clothing, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. 26:66 What do you think?" They answered, "He is worthy of death!" 26:67 Then they spit in his face and beat him with their fists, and some slapped him, 26:68 saying, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who hit you?" 26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the court, and a maid came to him, saying, "You were also with Jesus, the Galilean!"

Matt[109] 26:70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about." 26:71 When he had gone out onto the porch, someone else saw him, and said to those who were there, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth." 26:72 Again he denied it with an oath, "I don't know the man." 26:73 After a little while those who stood by came and said to Peter, "Surely you are also one of them, for your speech makes you known." 26:74 Then he began to curse and to swear, "I don't know the man!" Immediately the rooster crowed. 26:75 Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went out and wept bitterly.

27. The Betrayal and Crucifixion

Matt[110] 27:01 Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 27:02 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pontius Pilate, the governor. 27:03 Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 27:04 saying, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? You see to it." 27:05 He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself. 27:06 The chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, "It's not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood." 27:07 They took counsel, and bought the potter's field with them, to bury strangers in. 27:08 Therefore that field was called "The Field of Blood" to this day. 27:09 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah{some manuscripts omit "Jeremaiah"} the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him upon whom a price had been set, whom some of the children of Israel priced,

Matt[111] 27:10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."{Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 19:1-13; 32:6-9} 27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said to him, "So you say." 27:12 When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 27:13 Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how many things they testify against you?" 27:14 He gave him no answer, not even one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. 27:15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner, whom they desired. 27:16 They had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

27:17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?" 27:18 For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up. 27:19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."

Matt[112] 27:20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 27:21 But the governor answered them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" 27:22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do to Jesus, who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let him be crucified!" 27:23 But the governor said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they cried out exceedingly, saying, "Let him be crucified!" 27:24 So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it." 27:25 All the people answered, "May his blood be on us, and on our children!" 27:26 Then he released to them Barabbas, but Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified. 27:27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered the whole garrison together against him. 27:28 They stripped him, and put a scarlet robe on him. 27:29 They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Matt[113] 27:30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 27:31 When they had mocked him, they took the robe off of him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. 27:32 As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross. 27:33 They came to a place called "Golgotha," that is to say, "The place of a skull." 27:34 They gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall. When he had tasted it, he would not drink. 27:35 When they had crucified him, they divided his clothing among them, casting lots,{TR adds "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: 'They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots;'" [see Psalm 22:18 and John 19:24]} 27:36 and they sat and watched him there. 27:37 They set up over his head the accusation against him written, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." 27:38 Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left. 27:39 Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads,

Matt[114] 27:40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" 27:41 Likewise the chief priests also mocking, with the scribes, the Pharisees,{TR omits "the Pharisees"} and the elders, said, 27:42 "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 27:43 He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 27:44 The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach. 27:45 Now from the sixth hour{noon} there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.{ 3:0 P. M.}

27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima{TR reads 'lama' instead of 'lima'} sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"{Psalm 22:1} 27:47 Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 27:48 Immediately one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink. 27:49 The rest said, "Let him be. Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

Matt[115] 27:50 Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. 27:51 Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. 27:52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 27:53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. 27:54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God." 27:55 Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him. 27:56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. 27:57 When evening had come, a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who himself was also Jesus' disciple came. 27:58 This man went to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. 27:59 Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

Matt[116] 27:60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. 27:61 Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. 27:62 Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, 27:63 saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise again.' 27:64 Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead;' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 27:65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard. Go, make it as secure as you can." 27:66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone.

28. The Resurrection of Jesus and the Great Commission

Matt[117] 28:01 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 28:02 Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat on it. 28:03 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 28:04 For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men. 28:05 The angel answered the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. 28:06 He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. 28:07 Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you." 28:08 They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. 28:09 As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" They came and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Matt[118] 28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go tell my brothers{The word for 'brothers' here may be also correctly translated 'brothers and sisters' or 'siblings.'} that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me." 28:11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told the chief priests all the things that had happened. 28:12 When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave a large amount of silver to the soldiers, 28:13 saying, "Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. 28:14 If this comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry." 28:15 So they took the money and did as they were told. This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continues until this day. 28:16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. 28:17 When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. 28:18 Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 28:19 Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

4.5 The Dhammapada

1. The Twin-Verses

Dham[001] 1. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. 2. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him. 3. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,"--in those who harbour such thoughts hatred will never cease. 4. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,"--in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease. 5. For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule. 6. The world does not know that we must all come to an end here;--but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once. 7. He who lives looking for pleasures only, his senses uncontrolled, immoderate in his food, idle, and weak, Mara (the tempter) will certainly overthrow him, as the wind throws down a weak tree. 8. He who lives without looking for pleasures, his senses well controlled, moderate in his food, faithful and strong, him Mara will certainly not overthrow, any more than the wind throws down a rocky mountain. 9. He who wishes to put on the yellow dress without having cleansed himself from sin, who disregards temperance and truth, is unworthy of the yellow dress.

Dham[002] 10. But he who has cleansed himself from sin, is well grounded in all virtues, and regards also temperance and truth, he is indeed worthy of the yellow dress. 11. They who imagine truth in untruth, and see untruth in truth, never arrive at truth, but follow vain desires. 12. They who know truth in truth, and untruth in untruth, arrive at truth, and follow true desires. 13. As rain breaks through an ill-thatched house, passion will break through an unreflecting mind. 14. As rain does not break through a well-thatched house, passion will not break through a well-reflecting mind. 15. The evil-doer mourns in this world, and he mourns in the next; he mourns in both. He mourns and suffers when he sees the evil of his own work. 16. The virtuous man delights in this world, and he delights in the next; he delights in both. He delights and rejoices, when he sees the purity of his own work. 17. The evil-doer suffers in this world, and he suffers in the next; he suffers in both. He suffers when he thinks of the evil he has done; he suffers more when going on the evil path. 18. The virtuous man is happy in this world, and he is happy in the next; he is happy in both. He is happy when he thinks of the good he has done; he is still more happy when going on the good path. 19. The thoughtless man, even if he can recite a large portion (of the law), but is not a doer of it, has no share in the priesthood, but is like a cowherd counting the cows of others. 20. The follower of the law, even if he can recite only a small portion (of the law), but, having forsaken passion and hatred and foolishness, possesses true knowledge and serenity of mind, he, caring for nothing in this world or that to come, has indeed a share in the priesthood.

2. On Earnestness

Dham[003] 21. Earnestness is the path of immortality (Nirvana), thoughtlessness the path of death. Those who are in earnest do not die, those who are thoughtless are as if dead already. 22. Those who are advanced in earnestness, having understood this clearly, delight in earnestness, and rejoice in the knowledge of the Ariyas (the elect). 23. These wise people, meditative, steady, always possessed of strong powers, attain to Nirvana, the highest happiness. 24. If an earnest person has roused himself, if he is not forgetful, if his deeds are pure, if he acts with consideration, if he restrains himself, and lives according to law,--then his glory will increase. 25. By rousing himself, by earnestness, by restraint and control, the wise man may make for himself an island which no flood can overwhelm. 26. Fools follow after vanity, men of evil wisdom. The wise man keeps earnestness as his best jewel. 27. Follow not after vanity, nor after the enjoyment of love and lust! He who is earnest and meditative, obtains ample joy. 28. When the learned man drives away vanity by earnestness, he, the wise, climbing the terraced heights of wisdom, looks down upon the fools, serene he looks upon the toiling crowd, as one that stands on a mountain looks down upon them that stand upon the plain. 29. Earnest among the thoughtless, awake among the sleepers, the wise man advances like a racer, leaving behind the hack.

Dham[004] 30. By earnestness did Maghavan (Indra) rise to the lordship of the gods. People praise earnestness; thoughtlessness is always blamed. 31. A Bhikshu (mendicant) who delights in earnestness, who looks with fear on thoughtlessness, moves about like fire, burning all his fetters, small or large. 32. A Bhikshu (mendicant) who delights in reflection, who looks with fear on thoughtlessness, cannot fall away (from his perfect state)--he is close upon Nirvana.

3. Thought

Dham[005] 33. As a fletcher makes straight his arrow, a wise man makes straight his trembling and unsteady thought, which is difficult to guard, difficult to hold back. 34. As a fish taken from his watery home and thrown on dry ground, our thought trembles all over in order to escape the dominion of Mara (the tempter). 35. It is good to tame the mind, which is difficult to hold in and flighty, rushing wherever it listeth; a tamed mind brings happiness. 36. Let the wise man guard his thoughts, for they are difficult to perceive, very artful, and they rush wherever they list: thoughts well guarded bring happiness. 37. Those who bridle their mind which travels far, moves about alone, is without a body, and hides in the chamber (of the heart), will be free from the bonds of Mara (the tempter). 38. If a man's thoughts are unsteady, if he does not know the true law, if his peace of mind is troubled, his knowledge will never be perfect. 39. If a man's thoughts are not dissipated, if his mind is not perplexed, if he has ceased to think of good or evil, then there is no fear for him while he is watchful.

Dham[006] 40. Knowing that this body is (fragile) like a jar, and making this thought firm like a fortress, one should attack Mara (the tempter) with the weapon of knowledge, one should watch him when conquered, and should never rest. 41. Before long, alas! this body will lie on the earth, despised, without understanding, like a useless log.

42. Whatever a hater may do to a hater, or an enemy to an enemy, a wrongly-directed mind will do us greater mischief. 43. Not a mother, not a father will do so much, nor any other relative; a well-directed mind will do us greater service.

4. Flowers

Dham[007] 44. Who shall overcome this earth, and the world of Yama (the lord of the departed), and the world of the gods? Who shall find out the plainly shown path of virtue, as a clever man finds out the (right) flower? 45. The disciple will overcome the earth, and the world of Yama, and the world of the gods. The disciple will find out the plainly shown path of virtue, as a clever man finds out the (right) flower. 46. He who knows that this body is like froth, and has learnt that it is as unsubstantial as a mirage, will break the flower-pointed arrow of Mara, and never see the king of death. 47. Death carries off a man who is gathering flowers and whose mind is distracted, as a flood carries off a sleeping village. 48. Death subdues a man who is gathering flowers, and whose mind is distracted, before he is satiated in his pleasures. 49. As the bee collects nectar and departs without injuring the flower, or its colour or scent, so let a sage dwell in his village.

Dham[008] 50. Not the perversities of others, not their sins of commission or omission, but his own misdeeds and negligences should a sage take notice of. 51. Like a beautiful flower, full of colour, but without scent, are the fine but fruitless words of him who does not act accordingly. 52. But, like a beautiful flower, full of colour and full of scent, are the fine and fruitful words of him who acts accordingly. 53. As many kinds of wreaths can be made from a heap of flowers, so many good things may be achieved by a mortal when once he is born. 54. The scent of flowers does not travel against the wind, nor (that of) sandal-wood, or of Tagara and Mallika flowers; but the odour of good people travels even against the wind; a good man pervades every place. 55. Sandal-wood or Tagara, a lotus-flower, or a Vassiki, among these sorts of perfumes, the perfume of virtue is unsurpassed. 56. Mean is the scent that comes from Tagara and sandal-wood;--the perfume of those who possess virtue rises up to the gods as the highest. 57. Of the people who possess these virtues, who live without thoughtlessness, and who are emancipated through true knowledge, Mara, the tempter, never finds the way. 58, 59. As on a heap of rubbish cast upon the highway the lily will grow full of sweet perfume and delight, thus the disciple of the truly enlightened Buddha shines forth by his knowledge among those who are like rubbish, among the people that walk in darkness.

5. The Fool

Dham[009] 60. Long is the night to him who is awake; long is a mile to him who is tired; long is life to the foolish who do not know the true law. 61. If a traveller does not meet with one who is his better, or his equal, let him firmly keep to his solitary journey; there is no companionship with a fool. 62. "These sons belong to me, and this wealth belongs to me," with such thoughts a fool is tormented. He himself does not belong to himself; how much less sons and wealth? 63. The fool who knows his foolishness, is wise at least so far. But a fool who thinks himself wise, he is called a fool indeed. 64. If a fool be associated with a wise man even all his life, he will perceive the truth as little as a spoon perceives the taste of soup.

65. If an intelligent man be associated for one minute only with a wise man, he will soon perceive the truth, as the tongue perceives the taste of soup. 66. Fools of little understanding have themselves for their greatest enemies, for they do evil deeds which must bear bitter fruits. 67. That deed is not well done of which a man must repent, and the reward of which he receives crying and with a tearful face. 68. No, that deed is well done of which a man does not repent, and the reward of which he receives gladly and cheerfully. 69. As long as the evil deed done does not bear fruit, the fool thinks it is like honey; but when it ripens, then the fool suffers grief.

Dham[010] 70. Let a fool month after month eat his food (like an ascetic) with the tip of a blade of Kusa grass, yet he is not worth the sixteenth particle of those who have well weighed the law. 71. An evil deed, like newly-drawn milk, does not turn (suddenly); smouldering, like fire covered by ashes, it follows the fool. 72. And when the evil deed, after it has become known, brings sorrow to the fool, then it destroys his bright lot, nay, it cleaves his head. 73. Let the fool wish for a false reputation, for precedence among the Bhikshus, for lordship in the convents, for worship among other people! 74. "May both the layman and he who has left the world think that this is done by me; may they be subject to me in everything which is to be done or is not to be done," thus is the mind of the fool, and his desire and pride increase. 75. "One is the road that leads to wealth, another the road that leads to Nirvana;" if the Bhikshu, the disciple of Buddha, has learnt this, he will not yearn for honour, he will strive after separation from the world.

6. The Wise Man (Pandita)

Dham[011] 76. If you see an intelligent man who tells you where true treasures are to be found, who shows what is to be avoided, and administers reproofs, follow that wise man; it will be better, not worse, for those who follow him. 77. Let him admonish, let him teach, let him forbid what is improper!- -he will be beloved of the good, by the bad he will be hated. 78. Do not have evil-doers for friends, do not have low people for friends: have virtuous people for friends, have for friends the best of men. 79. He who drinks in the law lives happily with a serene mind: the sage rejoices always in the law, as preached by the elect (Ariyas).

Dham[012] 80. Well-makers lead the water (wherever they like); fletchers bend the arrow; carpenters bend a log of wood; wise people fashion themselves. 81. As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind, wise people falter not amidst blame and praise. 82. Wise people, after they have listened to the laws, become serene, like a deep, smooth, and still lake. 83. Good people walk on whatever befall, the good do not prattle, longing for pleasure; whether touched by happiness or sorrow wise people never appear elated or depressed. 84. If, whether for his own sake, or for the sake of others, a man wishes neither for a son, nor for wealth, nor for lordship, and if he does not wish for his own success by unfair means, then he is good, wise, and virtuous. 85. Few are there among men who arrive at the other shore (become Arhats); the other people here run up and down the shore. 86. But those who, when the law has been well preached to them, follow the law, will pass across the dominion of death, however difficult to overcome.

87, 88. A wise man should leave the dark state (of ordinary life), and follow the bright state (of the Bhikshu). After going from his home to a homeless state, he should in his retirement look for enjoyment where there seemed to be no enjoyment. Leaving all pleasures behind, and calling nothing his own, the wise man should purge himself from all the troubles of the mind. 89. Those whose mind is well grounded in the (seven) elements of knowledge, who without clinging to anything, rejoice in freedom from attachment, whose appetites have been conquered, and who are full of light, are free (even) in this world.

7. The Venerable (Arhat)

Dham[013] 90. There is no suffering for him who has finished his journey, and abandoned grief, who has freed himself on all sides, and thrown off all fetters. 91. They depart with their thoughts well-collected, they are not happy in their abode; like swans who have left their lake, they leave their house and home. 92. Men who have no riches, who live on recognised food, who have perceived void and unconditioned freedom (Nirvana), their path is difficult to understand, like that of birds in the air. 93. He whose appetites are stilled, who is not absorbed in enjoyment, who has perceived void and unconditioned freedom (Nirvana), his path is difficult to understand, like that of birds in the air. 94. The gods even envy him whose senses, like horses well broken in by the driver, have been subdued, who is free from pride, and free from appetites. 95. Such a one who does his duty is tolerant like the earth, like Indra's bolt; he is like a lake without mud; no new births are in store for him. 96. His thought is quiet, quiet are his word and deed, when he has obtained freedom by true knowledge, when he has thus become a quiet man. 97. The man who is free from credulity, but knows the uncreated, who has cut all ties, removed all temptations, renounced all desires, he is the greatest of men. 98. In a hamlet or in a forest, in the deep water or on the dry land, wherever venerable persons (Arhanta) dwell, that place is delightful. 99. Forests are delightful; where the world finds no delight, there the passionless will find delight, for they look not for pleasures.

8. The Thousands

Dham[014] 100. Even though a speech be a thousand (of words), but made up of senseless words, one word of sense is better, which if a man hears, he becomes quiet. 101. Even though a Gatha (poem) be a thousand (of words), but made up of senseless words, one word of a Gatha is better, which if a man hears, he becomes quiet. 102. Though a man recite a hundred Gathas made up of senseless words, one word of the law is better, which if a man hears, he becomes quiet. 103. If one man conquer in battle a thousand times thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greatest of conquerors. 104, 105. One's own self conquered is better than all other people; not even a god, a Gandharva, not Mara with Brahman could change into defeat the victory of a man who has vanquished himself, and always lives under restraint. 106. If a man for a hundred years sacrifice month after month with a thousand, and if he but for one moment pay homage to a man whose soul is grounded (in true knowledge), better is that homage than sacrifice for a hundred years. 107. If a man for a hundred years worship Agni (fire) in the forest, and if he but for one moment pay homage to a man whose soul is grounded (in true knowledge), better is that homage than sacrifice for a hundred years.

108. Whatever a man sacrifice in this world as an offering or as an oblation for a whole year in order to gain merit, the whole of it is not worth a quarter (a farthing); reverence shown to the righteous is better. 109. He who always greets and constantly reveres the aged, four things will increase to him, viz. life, beauty, happiness, power.

Dham[015] 110. But he who lives a hundred years, vicious and unrestrained, a life of one day is better if a man is virtuous and reflecting. 111. And he who lives a hundred years, ignorant and unrestrained, a life of one day is better if a man is wise and reflecting. 112. And he who lives a hundred years, idle and weak, a life of one day is better if a man has attained firm strength. 113. And he who lives a hundred years, not seeing beginning and end, a life of one day is better if a man sees beginning and end. 114. And he who lives a hundred years, not seeing the immortal place, a life of one day is better if a man sees the immortal place. 115. And he who lives a hundred years, not seeing the highest law, a life of one day is better if a man sees the highest law.

9. Evil

Dham[016] 116. If a man would hasten towards the good, he should keep his thought away from evil; if a man does what is good slothfully, his mind delights in evil. 117. If a man commits a sin, let him not do it again; let him not delight in sin: pain is the outcome of evil. 118. If a man does what is good, let him do it again; let him delight in it: happiness is the outcome of good. 119. Even an evil-doer sees happiness as long as his evil deed has not ripened; but when his evil deed has ripened, then does the evil-doer see evil.

Dham[017] 120. Even a good man sees evil days, as long as his good deed has not ripened; but when his good deed has ripened, then does the good man see happy days. 121. Let no man think lightly of evil, saying in his heart, "It will not come nigh unto me." Even by the falling of water-drops a water-pot is filled; the fool becomes full of evil, even if he gather it little by little. 122. Let no man think lightly of good, saying in his heart, "It will not come nigh unto me." Even by the falling of water-drops a water-pot is filled; the wise man becomes full of good, even if he gather it little by little. 123. Let a man avoid evil deeds, as a merchant, if he has few companions and carries much wealth, avoids a dangerous road; as a man who loves life avoids poison. 124. He who has no wound on his hand, may touch poison with his hand; poison does not affect one who has no wound; nor is there evil for one who does not commit evil. 125. If a man offend a harmless, pure, and innocent person, the evil falls back upon that fool, like light dust thrown up against the wind. 126. Some people are born again; evil-doers go to hell; righteous people go to heaven; those who are free from all worldly desires attain Nirvana. 127. Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea, not if we enter into the clefts of the mountains, is there known a spot in the whole world where death could not overcome (the mortal).

10. Punishment

Dham[018] 129. All men tremble at punishment, all men fear death; remember that you are like unto them, and do not kill, nor cause slaughter. 130. All men tremble at punishment, all men love life; remember that thou art like unto them, and do not kill, nor cause slaughter.

131. He who seeking his own happiness punishes or kills beings who also long for happiness, will not find happiness after death. 132. He who seeking his own happiness does not punish or kill beings who also long for happiness, will find happiness after death. 133. Do not speak harshly to anybody; those who are spoken to will answer thee in the same way. Angry speech is painful, blows for blows will touch thee. 134. If, like a shattered metal plate (gong), thou utter not, then thou hast reached Nirvana; contention is not known to thee. 135. As a cowherd with his staff drives his cows into the stable, so do Age and Death drive the life of men.

Dham[019] 136. A fool does not know when he commits his evil deeds: but the wicked man burns by his own deeds, as if burnt by fire. 137. He who inflicts pain on innocent and harmless persons, will soon come to one of these ten states: 138. He will have cruel suffering, loss, injury of the body, heavy affliction, or loss of mind, 139. Or a misfortune coming from the king, or a fearful accusation, or loss of relations, or destruction of treasures, 140. Or lightning-fire will burn his houses; and when his body is destroyed, the fool will go to hell. 141. Not nakedness, not platted hair, not dirt, not fasting, or lying on the earth, not rubbing with dust, not sitting motionless, can purify a mortal who has not overcome desires.

Dham[020] 142. He who, though dressed in fine apparel, exercises tranquility, is quiet, subdued, restrained, chaste, and has ceased to find fault with all other beings, he indeed is a Brahmana, an ascetic (sramana), a friar (bhikshu). 143. Is there in this world any man so restrained by humility that he does not mind reproof, as a well-trained horse the whip? 144. Like a well-trained horse when touched by the whip, be ye active and lively, and by faith, by virtue, by energy, by meditation, by discernment of the law you will overcome this great pain (of reproof), perfect in knowledge and in behaviour, and never forgetful. 145. Well-makers lead the water (wherever they like); fletchers bend the arrow; carpenters bend a log of wood; good people fashion themselves.

11. Old Age

Dham[021] 146. How is there laughter, how is there joy, as this world is always burning? Why do you not seek a light, ye who are surrounded by darkness? 147. Look at this dressed-up lump, covered with wounds, joined together, sickly, full of many thoughts, which has no strength, no hold! 148. This body is wasted, full of sickness, and frail; this heap of corruption breaks to pieces, life indeed ends in death. 149. Those white bones, like gourds thrown away in the autumn, what pleasure is there in looking at them?

Dham[022] 150. After a stronghold has been made of the bones, it is covered with flesh and blood, and there dwell in it old age and death, pride and deceit. 151. The brilliant chariots of kings are destroyed, the body also approaches destruction, but the virtue of good people never approaches destruction,--thus do the good say to the good. 152. A man who has learnt little, grows old like an ox; his flesh grows, but his knowledge does not grow.

153, 154. Looking for the maker of this tabernacle, I shall have to run through a course of many births, so long as I do not find (him); and painful is birth again and again. But now, maker of the tabernacle, thou hast been seen; thou shalt not make up this tabernacle again. All thy rafters are broken, thy ridge-pole is sundered; the mind, approaching the Eternal (visankhara, nirvana), has attained to the extinction of all desires. 155. Men who have not observed proper discipline, and have not gained treasure in their youth, perish like old herons in a lake without fish. 156. Men who have not observed proper discipline, and have not gained treasure in their youth, lie, like broken bows, sighing after the past.

12. Self

Dham[023] 157. If a man hold himself dear, let him watch himself carefully; during one at least out of the three watches a wise man should be watchful. 158. Let each man direct himself first to what is proper, then let him teach others; thus a wise man will not suffer. 159. If a man make himself as he teaches others to be, then, being himself well subdued, he may subdue (others); one's own self is indeed difficult to subdue.

Dham[024] 160. Self is the lord of self, who else could be the lord? With self well subdued, a man finds a lord such as few can find. 161. The evil done by oneself, self-begotten, self-bred, crushes the foolish, as a diamond breaks a precious stone. 162. He whose wickedness is very great brings himself down to that state where his enemy wishes him to be, as a creeper does with the tree which it surrounds. 163. Bad deeds, and deeds hurtful to ourselves, are easy to do; what is beneficial and good, that is very difficult to do. 164. The foolish man who scorns the rule of the venerable (Arahat), of the elect (Ariya), of the virtuous, and follows false doctrine, he bears fruit to his own destruction, like the fruits of the Katthaka reed. 165. By oneself the evil is done, by oneself one suffers; by oneself evil is left undone, by oneself one is purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself, no one can purify another. 166. Let no one forget his own duty for the sake of another's, however great; let a man, after he has discerned his own duty, be always attentive to his duty.

13. The World

Dham[025] 167. Do not follow the evil law! Do not live on in thoughtlessness! Do not follow false doctrine! Be not a friend of the world. 168. Rouse thyself! do not be idle! Follow the law of virtue! The virtuous rests in bliss in this world and in the next. 169. Follow the law of virtue; do not follow that of sin. The virtuous rests in bliss in this world and in the next.

Dham[026] 170. Look upon the world as a bubble, look upon it as a mirage: the king of death does not see him who thus looks down upon the world. 171. Come, look at this glittering world, like unto a royal chariot; the foolish are immersed in it, but the wise do not touch it. 172. He who formerly was reckless and afterwards became sober, brightens up this world, like the moon when freed from clouds. 173. He whose evil deeds are covered by good deeds, brightens up this world, like the moon when freed from clouds. 174. This world is dark, few only can see here; a few only go to heaven, like birds escaped from the net. 175. The swans go on the path of the sun, they go through the ether by means of their miraculous power; the wise are led out of this world, when they have conquered Mara and his train.

176. If a man has transgressed one law, and speaks lies, and scoffs at another world, there is no evil he will not do. 177. The uncharitable do not go to the world of the gods; fools only do not praise liberality; a wise man rejoices in liberality, and through it becomes blessed in the other world. 178. Better than sovereignty over the earth, better than going to heaven, better than lordship over all worlds, is the reward of the first step in holiness.

14. The Buddha (The Awakened)

Dham[027] 179. He whose conquest is not conquered again, into whose conquest no one in this world enters, by what track can you lead him, the Awakened, the Omniscient, the trackless?

Dham[028] 180. He whom no desire with its snares and poisons can lead astray, by what track can you lead him, the Awakened, the Omniscient, the trackless? 181. Even the gods envy those who are awakened and not forgetful, who are given to meditation, who are wise, and who delight in the repose of retirement (from the world). 182. Difficult (to obtain) is the conception of men, difficult is the life of mortals, difficult is the hearing of the True Law, difficult is the birth of the Awakened (the attainment of Buddhahood). 183. Not to commit any sin, to do good, and to purify one's mind, that is the teaching of (all) the Awakened. 184. The Awakened call patience the highest penance, long-suffering the highest Nirvana; for he is not an anchorite (pravragita) who strikes others, he is not an ascetic (sramana) who insults others. 185. Not to blame, not to strike, to live restrained under the law, to be moderate in eating, to sleep and sit alone, and to dwell on the highest thoughts, this is the teaching of the Awakened. 186. There is no satisfying lusts, even by a shower of gold pieces; he who knows that lusts have a short taste and cause pain, he is wise; 187. Even in heavenly pleasures he finds no satisfaction, the disciple who is fully awakened delights only in the destruction of all desires. 188. Men, driven by fear, go to many a refuge, to mountains and forests, to groves and sacred trees. 189. But that is not a safe refuge, that is not the best refuge; a man is not delivered from all pains after having gone to that refuge.

Dham[029] 190. He who takes refuge with Buddha, the Law, and the Church; he who, with clear understanding, sees the four holy truths: 191. Viz. pain, the origin of pain, the destruction of pain, and the eightfold holy way that leads to the quieting of pain; 192. That is the safe refuge, that is the best refuge; having gone to that refuge, a man is delivered from all pain. 193. A supernatural person (a Buddha) is not easily found, he is not born everywhere. Wherever such a sage is born, that race prospers. 194. Happy is the arising of the awakened, happy is the teaching of the True Law, happy is peace in the church, happy is the devotion of those who are at peace. 195, 196. He who pays homage to those who deserve homage, whether the awakened (Buddha) or their disciples, those who have overcome the host (of evils), and crossed the flood of sorrow, he who pays homage to such as have found deliverance and know no fear, his merit can never be measured by anybody.

15. Happiness

Dham[030] 197. Let us live happily then, not hating those who hate us! Among men who hate us let us dwell free from hatred! 198. Let us live happily then, free from ailments among the ailing! Among men who are ailing let us dwell free from ailments! 199. Let us live happily then, free from greed among the greedy! Among men who are greedy let us dwell free from greed!

Dham[031] 200. Let us live happily then, though we call nothing our own! We shall be like the bright gods, feeding on happiness! 201. Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy. He who has given up both victory and defeat, he, the contented, is happy. 202. There is no fire like passion; there is no losing throw like hatred; there is no pain like this body; there is no happiness higher than rest. 203. Hunger is the worst of diseases, the body the greatest of pains; if one knows this truly, that is Nirvana, the highest happiness. 204. Health is the greatest of gifts, contentedness the best riches; trust is the best of relationships, Nirvana the highest happiness. 205. He who has tasted the sweetness of solitude and tranquillity, is free from fear and free from sin, while he tastes the sweetness of drinking in the law. 206. The sight of the elect (Arya) is good, to live with them is always happiness; if a man does not see fools, he will be truly happy. 207. He who walks in the company of fools suffers a long way; company with fools, as with an enemy, is always painful; company with the wise is pleasure, like meeting with kinsfolk. 208. Therefore, one ought to follow the wise, the intelligent, the learned, the much enduring, the dutiful, the elect; one ought to follow a good and wise man, as the moon follows the path of the stars.

16. Pleasure

Dham[032] 209. He who gives himself to vanity, and does not give himself to meditation, forgetting the real aim (of life) and grasping at pleasure, will in time envy him who has exerted himself in meditation.

Dham[033] 210. Let no man ever look for what is pleasant, or what is unpleasant. Not to see what is pleasant is pain, and it is pain to see what is unpleasant. 211. Let, therefore, no man love anything; loss of the beloved is evil. Those who love nothing and hate nothing, have no fetters. 212. From pleasure comes grief, from pleasure comes fear; he who is free from pleasure knows neither grief nor fear. 213. From affection comes grief, from affection comes fear; he who is free from affection knows neither grief nor fear. 214. From lust comes grief, from lust comes fear; he who is free from lust knows neither grief nor fear. 215. From love comes grief, from love comes fear; he who is free from love knows neither grief nor fear. 216. From greed comes grief, from greed comes fear; he who is free from greed knows neither grief nor fear. 217. He who possesses virtue and intelligence, who is just, speaks the truth, and does what is his own business, him the world will hold dear. 218. He in whom a desire for the Ineffable (Nirvana) has sprung up, who is satisfied in his mind, and whose thoughts are not bewildered by love, he is called urdhvamsrotas (carried upwards by the stream). 219. Kinsmen, friends, and lovers salute a man who has been long away, and returns safe from afar.

220. In like manner his good works receive him who has done good, and has gone from this world to the other;--as kinsmen receive a friend on his return.

17. Anger

Dham[034] 221. Let a man leave anger, let him forsake pride, let him overcome all bondage! No sufferings befall the man who is not attached to name and form, and who calls nothing his own. 222. He who holds back rising anger like a rolling chariot, him I call a real driver; other people are but holding the reins. 223. Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth! 224. Speak the truth, do not yield to anger; give, if thou art asked for little; by these three steps thou wilt go near the gods. 225. The sages who injure nobody, and who always control their body, they will go to the unchangeable place (Nirvana), where, if they have gone, they will suffer no more. 226. Those who are ever watchful, who study day and night, and who strive after Nirvana, their passions will come to an end. 227. This is an old saying, O Atula, this is not only of to-day: "They blame him who sits silent, they blame him who speaks much, they also blame him who says little; there is no one on earth who is not blamed." 228. There never was, there never will be, nor is there now, a man who is always blamed, or a man who is always praised. 229, 230. But he whom those who discriminate praise continually day after day, as without blemish, wise, rich in knowledge and virtue, who would dare to blame him, like a coin made of gold from the Gambu river? Even the gods praise him, he is praised even by Brahman.

Dham[035] 231. Beware of bodily anger, and control thy body! Leave the sins of the body, and with thy body practise virtue! 232. Beware of the anger of the tongue, and control thy tongue! Leave the sins of the tongue, and practise virtue with thy tongue! 233. Beware of the anger of the mind, and control thy mind! Leave the sins of the mind, and practise virtue with thy mind! 234. The wise who control their body, who control their tongue, the wise who control their mind, are indeed well controlled.

18. Impurity

Dham[036] 235. Thou art now like a sear leaf, the messengers of death (Yama) have come near to thee; thou standest at the door of thy departure, and thou hast no provision for thy journey. 236. Make thyself an island, work hard, be wise! When thy impurities are blown away, and thou art free from guilt, thou wilt enter into the heavenly world of the elect (Ariya). 237. Thy life has come to an end, thou art come near to death (Yama), there is no resting-place for thee on the road, and thou hast no provision for thy journey. 238. Make thyself an island, work hard, be wise! When thy impurities are blown away, and thou art free from guilt, thou wilt not enter again into birth and decay. 239. Let a wise man blow off the impurities of his self, as a smith blows off the impurities of silver one by one, little by little, and from time to time.

Dham[037] 240. As the impurity which springs from the iron, when it springs from it, destroys it; thus do a transgressor's own works lead him to the evil path. 241. The taint of prayers is non-repetition; the taint of houses, non-repair; the taint of the body is sloth; the taint of a watchman, thoughtlessness. 242. Bad conduct is the taint of woman, greediness the taint of a benefactor; tainted are all evil ways in this world and in the next.

243. But there is a taint worse than all taints,--ignorance is the greatest taint. O mendicants! throw off that taint, and become taintless! 244. Life is easy to live for a man who is without shame, a crow hero, a mischief-maker, an insulting, bold, and wretched fellow. 245. But life is hard to live for a modest man, who always looks for what is pure, who is disinterested, quiet, spotless, and intelligent. 246. He who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who in this world takes what is not given him, who goes to another man's wife; 247. And the man who gives himself to drinking intoxicating liquors, he, even in this world, digs up his own root. 248. O man, know this, that the unrestrained are in a bad state; take care that greediness and vice do not bring thee to grief for a long time! 249. The world gives according to their faith or according to their pleasure: if a man frets about the food and the drink given to others, he will find no rest either by day or by night.

Dham[038] 250. He in whom that feeling is destroyed, and taken out with the very root, finds rest by day and by night. 251. There is no fire like passion, there is no shark like hatred, there is no snare like folly, there is no torrent like greed. 252. The fault of others is easily perceived, but that of oneself is difficult to perceive; a man winnows his neighbour's faults like chaff, but his own fault he hides, as a cheat hides the bad die from the gambler. 253. If a man looks after the faults of others, and is always inclined to be offended, his own passions will grow, and he is far from the destruction of passions. 254. There is no path through the air, a man is not a Samana by outward acts. The world delights in vanity, the Tathagatas (the Buddhas) are free from vanity. 255. There is no path through the air, a man is not a Samana by outward acts. No creatures are eternal; but the awakened (Buddha) are never shaken.

19. The Just

Dham[039] 256, 257. A man is not just if he carries a matter by violence; no, he who distinguishes both right and wrong, who is learned and leads others, not by violence, but by law and equity, and who is guarded by the law and intelligent, he is called just. 258. A man is not learned because he talks much; he who is patient, free from hatred and fear, he is called learned. 259. A man is not a supporter of the law because he talks much; even if a man has learnt little, but sees the law bodily, he is a supporter of the law, a man who never neglects the law.

Dham[040] 260. A man is not an elder because his head is grey; his age may be ripe, but he is called "Old-in-vain." 261. He in whom there is truth, virtue, love, restraint, moderation, he who is free from impurity and is wise, he is called an elder. 262. An envious greedy, dishonest man does not become respectable by means of much talking only, or by the beauty of his complexion. 263. He in whom all this is destroyed, and taken out with the very root, he, when freed from hatred and wise, is called respectable. 264. Not by tonsure does an undisciplined man who speaks falsehood become a Samana; can a man be a Samana who is still held captive by desire and greediness? 265. He who always quiets the evil, whether small or large, he is called a Samana (a quiet man), because he has quieted all evil. 266. A man is not a mendicant (Bhikshu) simply because he asks others for alms; he who adopts the whole law is a Bhikshu, not he who only begs.

267. He who is above good and evil, who is chaste, who with knowledge passes through the world, he indeed is called a Bhikshu. 268, 269. A man is not a Muni because he observes silence (mona, i.e. mauna), if he is foolish and ignorant; but the wise who, taking the balance, chooses the good and avoids evil, he is a Muni, and is a Muni thereby; he who in this world weighs both sides is called a Muni.

Dham[041] 270. A man is not an elect (Ariya) because he injures living creatures; because he has pity on all living creatures, therefore is a man called Ariya. 271, 272. Not only by discipline and vows, not only by much learning, not by entering into a trance, not by sleeping alone, do I earn the happiness of release which no worldling can know. Bhikshu, be not confident as long as thou hast not attained the extinction of desires.

20. The Way

Dham[042] 273. The best of ways is the eightfold; the best of truths the four words; the best of virtues passionlessness; the best of men he who has eyes to see. 274. This is the way, there is no other that leads to the purifying of intelligence. Go on this way! Everything else is the deceit of Mara (the tempter). 275. If you go on this way, you will make an end of pain! The way was preached by me, when I had understood the removal of the thorns (in the flesh). 276. You yourself must make an effort. The Tathagatas (Buddhas) are only preachers. The thoughtful who enter the way are freed from the bondage of Mara. 277. "All created things perish," he who knows and sees this becomes passive in pain; this is the way to purity. 278. "All created things are grief and pain," he who knows and sees this becomes passive in pain; this is the way that leads to purity. 279. "All forms are unreal," he who knows and sees this becomes passive in pain; this is the way that leads to purity.

Dham[043] 280. He who does not rouse himself when it is time to rise, who, though young and strong, is full of sloth, whose will and thought are weak, that lazy and idle man will never find the way to knowledge. 281. Watching his speech, well restrained in mind, let a man never commit any wrong with his body! Let a man but keep these three roads of action clear, and he will achieve the way which is taught by the wise. 282. Through zeal knowledge is gotten, through lack of zeal knowledge is lost; let a man who knows this double path of gain and loss thus place himself that knowledge may grow. 283. Cut down the whole forest (of lust), not a tree only! Danger comes out of the forest (of lust). When you have cut down both the forest (of lust) and its undergrowth, then, Bhikshus, you will be rid of the forest and free! 284. So long as the love of man towards women, even the smallest, is not destroyed, so long is his mind in bondage, as the calf that drinks milk is to its mother. 285. Cut out the love of self, like an autumn lotus, with thy hand! Cherish the road of peace. Nirvana has been shown by Sugata (Buddha). 286. "Here I shall dwell in the rain, here in winter and summer," thus the fool meditates, and does not think of his death. 287. Death comes and carries off that man, praised for his children and flocks, his mind distracted, as a flood carries off a sleeping village. 288. Sons are no help, nor a father, nor relations; there is no help from kinsfolk for one whom death has seized. 289. A wise and good man who knows the meaning of this, should quickly clear the way that leads to Nirvana.

21. Miscellaneous

Dham[044] 290. If by leaving a small pleasure one sees a great pleasure, let a wise man leave the small pleasure, and look to the great. 291. He who, by causing pain to others, wishes to obtain pleasure for himself, he, entangled in the bonds of hatred, will never be free from hatred. 292. What ought to be done is neglected, what ought not to be done is done; the desires of unruly, thoughtless people are always increasing. 293. But they whose whole watchfulness is always directed to their body, who do not follow what ought not to be done, and who steadfastly do what ought to be done, the desires of such watchful and wise people will come to an end. 294. A true Brahmana goes scatheless, though he have killed father and mother, and two valiant kings, though he has destroyed a kingdom with all its subjects. 295. A true Brahmana goes scatheless, though he have killed father and mother, and two holy kings, and an eminent man besides. 296. The disciples of Gotama (Buddha) are always well awake, and their thoughts day and night are always set on Buddha. 297. The disciples of Gotama are always well awake, and their thoughts day and night are always set on the law. 298. The disciples of Gotama are always well awake, and their thoughts day and night are always set on the church. 299. The disciples of Gotama are always well awake, and their thoughts day and night are always set on their body.

Dham[045] 300. The disciples of Gotama are always well awake, and their mind day and night always delights in compassion. 301. The disciples of Gotama are always well awake, and their mind day and night always delights in meditation. 302. It is hard to leave the world (to become a friar), it is hard to enjoy the world; hard is the monastery, painful are the houses; painful it is to dwell with equals (to share everything in common) and the itinerant mendicant is beset with pain. Therefore let no man be an itinerant mendicant and he will not be beset with pain. 303. Whatever place a faithful, virtuous, celebrated, and wealthy man chooses, there he is respected. 304. Good people shine from afar, like the snowy mountains; bad people are not seen, like arrows shot by night. 305. He alone who, without ceasing, practises the duty of sitting alone and sleeping alone, he, subduing himself, will rejoice in the destruction of all desires alone, as if living in a forest.

22. The Downward Course

Dham[046] 306. He who says what is not, goes to hell; he also who, having done a thing, says I have not done it. After death both are equal, they are men with evil deeds in the next world. 307. Many men whose shoulders are covered with the yellow gown are ill-conditioned and unrestrained; such evil-doers by their evil deeds go to hell. 308. Better it would be to swallow a heated iron ball, like flaring fire, than that a bad unrestrained fellow should live on the charity of the land. 309. Four things does a wreckless man gain who covets his neighbour's wife,--a bad reputation, an uncomfortable bed, thirdly, punishment, and lastly, hell.

Dham[047] 310. There is bad reputation, and the evil way (to hell), there is the short pleasure of the frightened in the arms of the frightened, and the king imposes heavy punishment; therefore let no man think of his neighbour's wife. 311. As a grass-blade, if badly grasped, cuts the arm, badly-practised asceticism leads to hell. 312. An act carelessly performed, a broken vow, and hesitating obedience to discipline, all this brings no great reward.

313. If anything is to be done, let a man do it, let him attack it vigorously! A careless pilgrim only scatters the dust of his passions more widely. 314. An evil deed is better left undone, for a man repents of it afterwards; a good deed is better done, for having done it, one does not repent. 315. Like a well-guarded frontier fort, with defences within and without, so let a man guard himself. Not a moment should escape, for they who allow the right moment to pass, suffer pain when they are in hell. 316. They who are ashamed of what they ought not to be ashamed of, and are not ashamed of what they ought to be ashamed of, such men, embracing false doctrines enter the evil path. 317. They who fear when they ought not to fear, and fear not when they ought to fear, such men, embracing false doctrines, enter the evil path. 318. They who forbid when there is nothing to be forbidden, and forbid not when there is something to be forbidden, such men, embracing false doctrines, enter the evil path. 319. They who know what is forbidden as forbidden, and what is not forbidden as not forbidden, such men, embracing the true doctrine, enter the good path.

23. The Elephant

Dham[048] 320. Silently shall I endure abuse as the elephant in battle endures the arrow sent from the bow: for the world is ill-natured. 321. They lead a tamed elephant to battle, the king mounts a tamed elephant; the tamed is the best among men, he who silently endures abuse. 322. Mules are good, if tamed, and noble Sindhu horses, and elephants with large tusks; but he who tames himself is better still. 323. For with these animals does no man reach the untrodden country (Nirvana), where a tamed man goes on a tamed animal, viz. on his own well-tamed self. 324. The elephant called Dhanapalaka, his temples running with sap, and difficult to hold, does not eat a morsel when bound; the elephant longs for the elephant grove. 325. If a man becomes fat and a great eater, if he is sleepy and rolls himself about, that fool, like a hog fed on wash, is born again and again. 326. This mind of mine went formerly wandering about as it liked, as it listed, as it pleased; but I shall now hold it in thoroughly, as the rider who holds the hook holds in the furious elephant. 327. Be not thoughtless, watch your thoughts! Draw yourself out of the evil way, like an elephant sunk in mud. 328. If a man find a prudent companion who walks with him, is wise, and lives soberly, he may walk with him, overcoming all dangers, happy, but considerate. 329. If a man find no prudent companion who walks with him, is wise, and lives soberly, let him walk alone, like a king who has left his conquered country behind,--like an elephant in the forest. 330. It is better to live alone, there is no companionship with a fool; let a man walk alone, let him commit no sin, with few wishes, like an elephant in the forest. 331. If an occasion arises, friends are pleasant; enjoyment is pleasant, whatever be the cause; a good work is pleasant in the hour of death; the giving up of all grief is pleasant. 332. Pleasant in the world is the state of a mother, pleasant the state of a father, pleasant the state of a Samana, pleasant the state of a Brahmana. 333. Pleasant is virtue lasting to old age, pleasant is a faith firmly rooted; pleasant is attainment of intelligence, pleasant is avoiding of sins.

24. Thirst

Dham[049] 334. The thirst of a thoughtless man grows like a creeper; he runs from life to life, like a monkey seeking fruit in the forest. 335. Whomsoever this fierce thirst overcomes, full of poison, in this world, his sufferings increase like the abounding Birana grass.

336. He who overcomes this fierce thirst, difficult to be conquered in this world, sufferings fall off from him, like water-drops from a lotus leaf. 337. This salutary word I tell you, "Do ye, as many as are here assembled, dig up the root of thirst, as he who wants the sweet-scented Usira root must dig up the Birana grass, that Mara (the tempter) may not crush you again and again, as the stream crushes the reeds." 338. As a tree, even though it has been cut down, is firm so long as its root is safe, and grows again, thus, unless the feeders of thirst are destroyed, the pain (of life) will return again and again. 339. He whose thirst running towards pleasure is exceeding strong in the thirty-six channels, the waves will carry away that misguided man, viz. his desires which are set on passion.

Dham[050] 340. The channels run everywhere, the creeper (of passion) stands sprouting; if you see the creeper springing up, cut its root by means of knowledge. 341. A creature's pleasures are extravagant and luxurious; sunk in lust and looking for pleasure, men undergo (again and again) birth and decay. 342. Men, driven on by thirst, run about like a snared hare; held in fetters and bonds, they undergo pain for a long time, again and again. 343. Men, driven on by thirst, run about like a snared hare; let therefore the mendicant drive out thirst, by striving after passionlessness for himself. 344. He who having got rid of the forest (of lust) (i.e. after having reached Nirvana) gives himself over to forest-life (i.e. to lust), and who, when removed from the forest (i.e. from lust), runs to the forest (i.e. to lust), look at that man! though free, he runs into bondage. 345. Wise people do not call that a strong fetter which is made of iron, wood, or hemp; far stronger is the care for precious stones and rings, for sons and a wife. 346. That fetter wise people call strong which drags down, yields, but is difficult to undo; after having cut this at last, people leave the world, free from cares, and leaving desires and pleasures behind. 347. Those who are slaves to passions, run down with the stream (of desires), as a spider runs down the web which he has made himself; when they have cut this, at last, wise people leave the world free from cares, leaving all affection behind. 348. Give up what is before, give up what is behind, give up what is in the middle, when thou goest to the other shore of existence; if thy mind is altogether free, thou wilt not again enter into birth and decay. 349. If a man is tossed about by doubts, full of strong passions, and yearning only for what is delightful, his thirst will grow more and more, and he will indeed make his fetters strong.

Dham[051] 350. If a man delights in quieting doubts, and, always reflecting, dwells on what is not delightful (the impurity of the body, etc.), he certainly will remove, nay, he will cut the fetter of Mara. 351. He who has reached the consummation, who does not tremble, who is without thirst and without sin, he has broken all the thorns of life: this will be his last body. 352. He who is without thirst and without affection, who understands the words and their interpretation, who knows the order of letters (those which are before and which are after), he has received his last body, he is called the great sage, the great man. 353. "I have conquered all, I know all, in all conditions of life I am free from taint; I have left all, and through the destruction of thirst I am free; having learnt myself, whom shall I teach?" 354. The gift of the law exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of the law exceeds all sweetness; the delight in the law exceeds all delights; the extinction of thirst overcomes all pain. 355. Pleasures destroy the foolish, if they look not for the other shore; the foolish by his thirst for pleasures destroys himself, as if he were his own enemy.

356. The fields are damaged by weeds, mankind is damaged by passion: therefore a gift bestowed on the passionless brings great reward. 357. The fields are damaged by weeds, mankind is damaged by hatred: therefore a gift bestowed on those who do not hate brings great reward. 358. The fields are damaged by weeds, mankind is damaged by vanity: therefore a gift bestowed on those who are free from vanity brings great reward. 359. The fields are damaged by weeds, mankind is damaged by lust: therefore a gift bestowed on those who are free from lust brings great reward.

25. The Bhikshu (Mendicant)

Dham[052] 360. Restraint in the eye is good, good is restraint in the ear, in the nose restraint is good, good is restraint in the tongue. 361. In the body restraint is good, good is restraint in speech, in thought restraint is good, good is restraint in all things. A Bhikshu, restrained in all things, is freed from all pain. 362. He who controls his hand, he who controls his feet, he who controls his speech, he who is well controlled, he who delights inwardly, who is collected, who is solitary and content, him they call Bhikshu. 363. The Bhikshu who controls his mouth, who speaks wisely and calmly, who teaches the meaning and the law, his word is sweet. 364. He who dwells in the law, delights in the law, meditates on the law, follows the law, that Bhikshu will never fall away from the true law. 365. Let him not despise what he has received, nor ever envy others: a mendicant who envies others does not obtain peace of mind. 366. A Bhikshu who, though he receives little, does not despise what he has received, even the gods will praise him, if his life is pure, and if he is not slothful. 367. He who never identifies himself with name and form, and does not grieve over what is no more, he indeed is called a Bhikshu. 368. The Bhikshu who acts with kindness, who is calm in the doctrine of Buddha, will reach the quiet place (Nirvana), cessation of natural desires, and happiness. 369. O Bhikshu, empty this boat! if emptied, it will go quickly; having cut off passion and hatred thou wilt go to Nirvana.

Dham[053] 370. Cut off the five (senses), leave the five, rise above the five. A Bhikshu, who has escaped from the five fetters, he is called Oghatinna, "saved from the flood." 371. Meditate, O Bhikshu, and be not heedless! Do not direct thy thought to what gives pleasure that thou mayest not for thy heedlessness have to swallow the iron ball (in hell), and that thou mayest not cry out when burning, "This is pain." 372. Without knowledge there is no meditation, without meditation there is no knowledge: he who has knowledge and meditation is near unto Nirvana. 373. A Bhikshu who has entered his empty house, and whose mind is tranquil, feels a more than human delight when he sees the law clearly. 374. As soon as he has considered the origin and destruction of the elements (khandha) of the body, he finds happiness and joy which belong to those who know the immortal (Nirvana). 375. And this is the beginning here for a wise Bhikshu: watchfulness over the senses, contentedness, restraint under the law; keep noble friends whose life is pure, and who are not slothful. 376. Let him live in charity, let him be perfect in his duties; then in the fulness of delight he will make an end of suffering. 377. As the Vassika plant sheds its withered flowers, men should shed passion and hatred, O ye Bhikshus! 378. The Bhikshu whose body and tongue and mind are quieted, who is collected, and has rejected the baits of the world, he is called quiet. 379. Rouse thyself by thyself, examine thyself by thyself, thus self- protected and attentive wilt thou live happily, O Bhikshu!

Dham[054] 380. For self is the lord of self, self is the refuge of self; therefore curb thyself as the merchant curbs a good horse. 381. The Bhikshu, full of delight, who is calm in the doctrine of Buddha will reach the quiet place (Nirvana), cessation of natural desires, and happiness. 382. He who, even as a young Bhikshu, applies himself to the doctrine of Buddha, brightens up this world, like the moon when free from clouds.

26. The Brahmana (Arhat)

Dham[055] 383. Stop the stream valiantly, drive away the desires, O Brahmana! When you have understood the destruction of all that was made, you will understand that which was not made. 384. If the Brahmana has reached the other shore in both laws (in restraint and contemplation), all bonds vanish from him who has obtained knowledge. 385. He for whom there is neither this nor that shore, nor both, him, the fearless and unshackled, I call indeed a Brahmana. 386. He who is thoughtful, blameless, settled, dutiful, without passions, and who has attained the highest end, him I call indeed a Brahmana. 387. The sun is bright by day, the moon shines by night, the warrior is bright in his armour, the Brahmana is bright in his meditation; but Buddha, the Awakened, is bright with splendour day and night. 388. Because a man is rid of evil, therefore he is called Brahmana; because he walks quietly, therefore he is called Samana; because he has sent away his own impurities, therefore he is called Pravragita (Pabbagita, a pilgrim). 389. No one should attack a Brahmana, but no Brahmana (if attacked) should let himself fly at his aggressor! Woe to him who strikes a Brahmana, more woe to him who flies at his aggressor!

Dham[056] 390. It advantages a Brahmana not a little if he holds his mind back from the pleasures of life; when all wish to injure has vanished, pain will cease. 391. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who does not offend by body, word, or thought, and is controlled on these three points. 392. After a man has once understood the law as taught by the Well-awakened (Buddha), let him worship it carefully, as the Brahmana worships the sacrificial fire. 393. A man does not become a Brahmana by his platted hair, by his family, or by birth; in whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brahmana. 394. What is the use of platted hair, O fool! what of the raiment of goat-skins? Within thee there is ravening, but the outside thou makest clean. 395. The man who wears dirty raiments, who is emaciated and covered with veins, who lives alone in the forest, and meditates, him I call indeed a Brahmana. 396. I do not call a man a Brahmana because of his origin or of his mother. He is indeed arrogant, and he is wealthy: but the poor, who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a Brahmana. 397. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who has cut all fetters, who never trembles, is independent and unshackled. 398. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who has cut the strap and the thong, the chain with all that pertains to it, who has burst the bar, and is awakened. 399. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, though he has committed no offence, endures reproach, bonds, and stripes, who has endurance for his force, and strength for his army.

Dham[057] 400. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is free from anger, dutiful, virtuous, without appetite, who is subdued, and has received his last body. 401. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who does not cling to pleasures, like water on a lotus leaf, like a mustard seed on the point of a needle. 402. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, even here, knows the end of his suffering, has put down his burden, and is unshackled.

403. Him I call indeed a Brahmana whose knowledge is deep, who possesses wisdom, who knows the right way and the wrong, and has attained the highest end. 404. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who keeps aloof both from laymen and from mendicants, who frequents no houses, and has but few desires. 405. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who finds no fault with other beings, whether feeble or strong, and does not kill nor cause slaughter. 406. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is tolerant with the intolerant, mild with fault-finders, and free from passion among the passionate. 407. Him I call indeed a Brahmana from whom anger and hatred, pride and envy have dropt like a mustard seed from the point of a needle. 408. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who utters true speech, instructive and free from harshness, so that he offend no one. 409. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who takes nothing in the world that is not given him, be it long or short, small or large, good or bad.

Dham[058] 410. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who fosters no desires for this world or for the next, has no inclinations, and is unshackled. 411. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who has no interests, and when he has understood (the truth), does not say, "How, how?" and who has reached the depth of the Immortal. 412. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who in this world is above good and evil, above the bondage of both, free from grief from sin, and from impurity. 413. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is bright like the moon, pure, serene, undisturbed, and in whom all gaiety is extinct. 414. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who has traversed this miry road, the impassable world and its vanity, who has gone through, and reached the other shore, is thoughtful, guileless, free from doubts, free from attachment, and content. 415. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who in this world, leaving all desires, travels about without a home, and in whom all concupiscence is extinct. 416. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, leaving all longings, travels about without a home, and in whom all covetousness is extinct. 417. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, after leaving all bondage to men, has risen above all bondage to the gods, and is free from all and every bondage. 418. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who has left what gives pleasure and what gives pain, who is cold, and free from all germs (of renewed life), the hero who has conquered all the worlds. 419. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who knows the destruction and the return of beings everywhere, who is free from bondage, welfaring (Sugata), and awakened (Buddha).

Dham[059] 420. Him I call indeed a Brahmana whose path the gods do not know, nor spirits (Gandharvas), nor men, whose passions are extinct, and who is an Arhat (venerable). 421. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who calls nothing his own, whether it be before, behind, or between, who is poor, and free from the love of the world. 422. Him I call indeed a Brahmana, the manly, the noble, the hero, the great sage, the conqueror, the impassible, the accomplished, the awakened. 423. Him I call indeed a Brahmana who knows his former abodes, who sees heaven and hell, has reached the end of births, is perfect in knowledge, a sage, and whose perfections are all perfect.

4.6 The Tao Te Ching

1. From the ineffable Tao emerges mystery and reality.
TaoT[001] 1: The tao that can be described is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be spoken is not the eternal Name. The nameless is the boundary of Heaven and Earth. The named is the mother of creation. Freed from desire, you can see the hidden mystery. By having desire, you can only see what is visibly real. Yet mystery and reality emerge from the same source. This source is called darkness. Darkness born from darkness. The beginning of all understanding.

2. Perception shapes duality and paradox.
TaoT[002] 2: When people see things as beautiful, ugliness is created. When people see things as good, evil is created. Being and non-being produce each other. Difficult and easy complement each other. Long and short define each other. High and low oppose each other. Fore and aft follow each other. Therefore the Master can act without doing anything and teach without saying a word. Things come her way and she does not stop them; things leave and she lets them go. She has without possessing, and acts without any expectations. When her work is done, she takes no credit. That is why it will last forever.

3. Find harmony through simplicity and detachment.
TaoT[003] 3: If you over esteem talented individuals, people will become overly competitive. If you overvalue possessions, people will begin to steal. Do not display your treasures or people will become envious. The Master leads by emptying people's minds, filling their bellies, weakening their ambitions, and making them become strong. Preferring simplicity and freedom from desires, avoiding the pitfalls of knowledge and wrong action. For those who practice not-doing, everything will fall into place.

4. The limitless Tao is ancient and infinite.
TaoT[004] 4: The Tao is like an empty container: it can never be emptied and can never be filled. Infinitely deep, it is the source of all things. It dulls the sharp, unties the knotted, shades the lighted, and unites all of creation with dust. It is hidden but always present. I don't know who gave birth to it. It is older than the concept of God.

5. From emptiness comes power; use it but do not try to explain it.
TaoT[005] 5: Heaven and Earth are impartial; they treat all of creation as straw dogs. The Master doesn't take sides; she treats everyone like a straw dog. The space between Heaven and Earth is like a bellows; it is empty, yet has not lost its power. The more it is used, the more it produces; the more you talk of it, the less you comprehend. It is better not to speak of things you do not understand.

6. Like vapor, all things emerge from eternal emptiness.
TaoT[006] 6: The spirit of emptiness is immortal. It is called the Great Mother because it gives birth to Heaven and Earth. It is like a vapor, barely seen but always present. Use it effortlessly.

7. Through detachment, find perfect fulfillment.
TaoT[007] 7: The Tao of Heaven is eternal, and the earth is long enduring. Why are they long enduring? They do not live for themselves; thus they are present for all beings. The Master puts herself last; And finds herself in the place of authority. She detaches herself from all things; Therefore she is united with all things. She gives no thought to self. She is perfectly fulfilled.

8. Supreme good embraces without competing.
TaoT[008] 8: The supreme good is like water, which benefits all of creation without trying to compete with it. It gathers in unpopular places. Thus it is like the Tao. The location makes the dwelling good. Depth of understanding makes the mind good. A kind heart makes the giving good. Integrity makes the government good. Accomplishment makes your labors good. Proper timing makes a decision good. Only when there is no competition will we all live in peace.

9. Be simple and humble and work without effort.
TaoT[009] 9: It is easier to carry an empty cup than one that is filled to the brim. The sharper the knife the easier it is to dull. The more wealth you possess the harder it is to protect. Pride brings its own trouble. When you have accomplished your goal simply walk away. This is the pathway to Heaven.

10. Improve yourself continuously, without expectation of reward.
TaoT[010] 10: Nurture the darkness of your soul until you become whole. Can you do this and not fail? Can you focus your life-breath until you become supple as a newborn child? While you cleanse your inner vision will you be found without fault? Can you love people and lead them without forcing your will on them? When Heaven gives and takes away can you be content with the outcome? When you understand all things can you step back from your own understanding? Giving birth and nourishing, making without possessing, expecting nothing in return. To grow, yet not to control: This is the mysterious virtue.

11. Work on the outside for better use of the emptiness inside.
TaoT[011] 11: Thirty spokes are joined together in a wheel, but it is the center hole that allows the wheel to function. We mold clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that makes the vessel useful. We fashion wood for a house, but it is the emptiness inside that makes it livable. We work with the substantial, but the emptiness is what we use.

12. Do not overcomplicate things, and trust your intuition.
TaoT[012] 12: Five colors blind the eye. Five notes deafen the ear. Five flavors make the palate go stale. Too much activity deranges the mind. Too much wealth causes crime. The Master acts on what she feels and not what she sees. She shuns the latter, and prefers to seek the former.

13. Detach from external measures, love the world as you love yourself.
TaoT[013] 13: Success is as dangerous as failure, and we are often our own worst enemy. What does it mean that success is as dangerous as failure? He who is superior is also someone's subordinate. Receiving favor and losing it both cause alarm. That is what is meant by success is as dangerous as failure. What does it mean that we are often our own worst enemy?

The reason I have an enemy is because I have "self". If I no longer had a "self", I would no longer have an enemy. Love the whole world as if it were your self; then you will truly care for all things.

14. Seek what is beyond description, that is the beginning of wisdom.
TaoT[014] 14: Look for it, and it can't be seen. Listen for it, and it can't be heard. Grasp for it, and it can't be caught. These three cannot be further described, so we treat them as The One. Its highest is not bright. Its depths are not dark. Unending, unnamable, it returns to nothingness. Formless forms, and imageless images, subtle, beyond all understanding. Approach it and you will not see a beginning; follow it and there will be no end. When we grasp the Tao of the ancient ones, we can use it to direct our life today. To know the ancient origin of Tao: this is the beginning of wisdom.

15. When you are mindful and spontaneous, correct action is effortless.
TaoT[015] 15: The Sages of old were profound and knew the ways of subtlety and discernment. Their wisdom is beyond our comprehension. Because their knowledge was so far superior I can only give a poor description. They were careful as someone crossing a frozen stream in winter. Alert as if surrounded on all sides by the enemy. Courteous as a guest. Fluid as melting ice. Whole as an uncarved block of wood. Receptive as a valley. Turbid as muddied water. Who can be still until their mud settles and the water is cleared by itself? Can you remain tranquil until right action occurs by itself? The Master doesn't seek fulfillment. For only those who are not full are able to be used which brings the feeling of completeness.

16. Empty your mind and accept everything, that is enlightenment.
TaoT[016] 16: If you can empty your mind of all thoughts your heart will embrace the tranquility of peace. Watch the workings of all of creation, but contemplate their return to the source. All creatures in the universe return to the point where they began. Returning to the source is tranquility because we submit to Heaven's mandate. Returning to Heaven's mandate is called being constant. Knowing the constant is called "enlightenment". Not knowing the constant is the source of evil deeds because we have no roots. By knowing the constant we can accept things as they are. By accepting things as they are, we become impartial. By being impartial, we become one with Heaven. By being one with Heaven, we become one with Tao. Being one with Tao, we are no longer concerned about losing our life because we know the Tao is constant and we are one with Tao.

17. Good leaders work quietly, trust their people, and empower them.
TaoT[017] 17: The best leaders are those the people hardly know exist. The next best is a leader who is loved and praised. Next comes the one who is feared. The worst one is the leader that is despised. If you don't trust the people, they will become untrustworthy. The best leaders value their words, and use them sparingly. When she has accomplished her task, the people say, "Amazing: we did it, all by ourselves!"

18. When the Way is lost, it is replaced by rules and principles.
TaoT[018] 18: When the great Tao is abandoned, charity and righteousness appear. When intellectualism arises, hypocrisy is close behind. When there is strife in the family unit, people talk about "brotherly love". When the country falls into chaos, politicians talk about "patriotism".

19. Embrace simplicity. Put others first. Desire little.
TaoT[019] 19: Forget about knowledge and wisdom, and people will be a hundred times better off. Throw away charity and righteousness, and people will return to brotherly love. Throw away profit and greed, and there won't be any thieves. These three are superficial and aren't enough to keep us at the center of the circle, so we must also: Embrace simplicity. Put others first. Desire little.

20. Live free of dualities, childlike, without possessions or goals.
TaoT[020] 20: Renounce knowledge and your problems will end. What is the difference between yes and no? What is the difference between good and evil? Must you fear what others fear? Nonsense, look how far you have missed the mark! Other people are joyous, as though they were at a spring festival. I alone am unconcerned and expressionless, like an infant before it has learned to smile. Other people have more than they need; I alone seem to possess nothing. I am lost and drift about with no place to go. I am like a fool, my mind is in chaos. Ordinary people are bright; I alone am dark. Ordinary people are clever; I alone am dull. Ordinary people seem discriminating; I alone am muddled and confused. I drift on the waves on the ocean, blown at the mercy of the wind. Other people have their goals, I alone am dull and uncouth. I am different from ordinary people. I nurse from the Great Mother's breasts.

21. True virtue is following the intangible and timeless within yourself.
TaoT[021] 21: The greatest virtue you can have comes from following only the Tao; which takes a form that is intangible and evasive. Even though the Tao is intangible and evasive, we are able to know it exists. Intangible and evasive, yet it has a manifestation. Secluded and dark, yet there is a vitality within it. Its vitality is very genuine. Within it we can find order. Since the beginning of time, the Tao has always existed. It is beyond existing and not existing. How do I know where creation comes from? I look inside myself and see it.

22. Be broken to be whole, empty to be filled, humble to be complete.
TaoT[022] 22: If you want to become whole, first let yourself become broken. If you want to become straight, first let yourself become twisted. If you want to become full, first let yourself become empty. If you want to become new, first let yourself become old. Those whose desires are few get them, those whose desires are great go astray. For this reason the Master embraces the Tao, as an example for the world to follow. Because she isn't self centered, people can see the light in her. Because she does not boast of herself, she becomes a shining example. Because she does not glorify herself, she becomes a person of merit. Because she wants nothing from the world, the world can not overcome her. When the ancient Masters said, "If you want to become whole, then first let yourself be broken," they weren't using empty words. All who do this will be made complete.

23. What you open yourself to, you become.
TaoT[023] 23: Nature uses few words: when the gale blows, it will not last long; when it rains hard, it lasts but a little while; What causes these to happen? Heaven and Earth. Why do we humans go on endlessly about little when nature does much in a little time? If you open yourself to the Tao, you and Tao become one. If you open yourself to Virtue, then you can become virtuous. If you open yourself to loss, then you will become lost.

If you open yourself to the Tao, the Tao will eagerly welcome you. If you open yourself to virtue, virtue will become a part of you. If you open yourself to loss, the lost are glad to see you. "When you do not trust people, people will become untrustworthy."

24. To follow the Tao, be earnest, humble, and sincere.
TaoT[024] 24: Those who stand on tiptoes do not stand firmly. Those who rush ahead don't get very far. Those who try to outshine others dim their own light. Those who call themselves righteous can't know how wrong they are. Those who boast of their accomplishments diminish the things they have done. Compared to the Tao, these actions are unworthy. If we are to follow the Tao, we must not do these things.

25. The Tao is the great all. Everywhere. Eternal. Complete.
TaoT[025] 25: Before the universe was born there was something in the chaos of the heavens. It stands alone and empty, solitary and unchanging. It is ever present and secure. It may be regarded as the Mother of the universe. Because I do not know its name, I call it the Tao. If forced to give it a name, I would call it "Great". Because it is Great means it is everywhere. Being everywhere means it is eternal. Being eternal means everything returns to it. Tao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Humanity is great. Within the universe, these are the four great things. Humanity follows the earth. Earth follows Heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. The Tao follows only itself.

26. Stillness and focus are your strength; distraction leads to weakness.
TaoT[026] 26: Heaviness is the basis of lightness. Stillness is the standard of activity. Thus the Master travels all day without ever leaving her wagon. Even though she has much to see, she is at peace in her indifference. Why should the lord of a thousand chariots be amused at the foolishness of the world? If you abandon yourself to foolishness, you lose touch with your beginnings. If you let yourself become distracted, you will lose the basis of your power.

27. Be a good person, see goodness, teach goodness, do good things.
TaoT[027] 27: A good traveler leaves no tracks, and a skillful speaker is well rehearsed. A good bookkeeper has an excellent memory, and a well made door is easy to open and needs no locks. A good knot needs no rope and it can not come undone. Thus the Master is willing to help everyone, and doesn't know the meaning of rejection. She is there to help all of creation, and doesn't abandon even the smallest creature. This is called embracing the light. What is a good person but a bad person's teacher? What is a bad person but raw material for his teacher? If you fail to honor your teacher or fail to enjoy your student, you will become deluded no matter how smart you are. It is the secret of prime importance.

28. Be balanced in all things; embrace the world with open arms.
TaoT[028] 28: Know the masculine, but keep to the feminine: and become a watershed to the world. If you embrace the world, the Tao will never leave you and you become as a little child. Know the white, yet keep to the black: be a model for the world. If you are a model for the world, the Tao inside you will strengthen and you will return whole to your eternal beginning. Know the honorable, but do not shun the disgraced: embracing the world as it is.

If you embrace the world with compassion, then your virtue will return you to the Uncarved Block. The block of wood is carved into utensils by carving void into the wood. The Master uses the utensils, yet prefers to keep to the block because of its limitless possibilities. Great works do not involve discarding substance.

29. Release control; from compassion comes balance.
TaoT[029] 29: Do you want to rule the world and control it? I don't think it can ever be done. The world is a sacred vessel and it can not be controlled. You will only it make it worse if you try. It may slip through your fingers and disappear. Some are meant to lead, and others are meant to follow; Some must always strain, and others have an easy time; Some are naturally big and strong, and others will always be small; Some will be protected and nurtured, and others will meet with destruction. The Master accepts things as they are, and out of compassion avoids extravagance, excess and the extremes.

30. Be gentle, humble, and compassionate.
TaoT[30] 30: Those who lead people by following the Tao don't use weapons to enforce their will. Using force always leads to unseen troubles. In the places where armies march, thorns and briars bloom and grow. After armies take to war, bad years must always follow. The skillful commander strikes a decisive blow then stops. When victory is won over the enemy through war it is not a thing of great pride. When the battle is over, arrogance is the new enemy. War can result when no other alternative is given, so the one who overcomes an enemy should not dominate them. The strong always weakened with time. This is not the way of the Tao. That which is not of the Tao will soon end.

31. Wisdom reveres peace and avoids unnecessary violence.
TaoT[031] 31: Weapons are the bearers of bad news; all people should detest them. The wise man values the left side, and in time of war he values the right. Weapons are meant for destruction, and thus are avoided by the wise. Only as a last resort will a wise person use a deadly weapon. If peace is her true objective, how can she rejoice in the victory of war? Those who rejoice in victory delight in the slaughter of humanity. Those who resort to violence will never bring peace to the world. The left side is a place of honor on happy occasions. The right side is reserved for mourning at a funeral. When the lieutenants take the left side to prepare for war, the general should be on the right side, because he knows the outcome will be death. The death of many should be greeted with great sorrow, and the victory celebration should honor those who have died.

32. The Tao is nameless, eternal; naming confines, limits, and divides.
TaoT[032] 32: The Tao is nameless and unchanging. Although it appears insignificant, nothing in the world can contain it. If a ruler abides by its principles, then her people will willingly follow. Heaven would then reign on earth, like sweet rain falling on paradise. People would have no need for laws, because the law would be written on their hearts. Naming is a necessity for order, but naming cannot order all things. Naming often makes things impersonal, so we should know when naming should end. Knowing when to stop naming, you can avoid the pitfall it brings. All things end in the Tao just as the small streams and the largest rivers flow through valleys to the sea.

33. Be introspective, disciplined, content, persistent, accepting.
TaoT[033] 33: Those who know others are intelligent; those who know themselves are truly wise. Those who master others are strong; those who master themselves have true power. Those who know they have enough are truly wealthy. Those who persist will reach their goal. Those who keep their course have a strong will. Those who embrace death will not perish, but have life everlasting.

34. The Tao is existence; it creates, nourishes, and supports all things.
TaoT[034] 34: The great Tao flows unobstructed in every direction. All things rely on it to conceive and be born, and it does not deny even the smallest of creation. When it has accomplished great wonders, it does not claim them for itself. It nourishes infinite worlds, yet it doesn't seek to master the smallest creature. Since it is without wants and desires, it can be considered humble. All of creation seeks it for refuge yet it does not seek to master or control. Because it does not seek greatness; it is able to accomplish truly great things.

35. To follow the Tao brings a peaceful heart; it never runs out.
TaoT[035] 35: She who follows the way of the Tao will draw the world to her steps. She can go without fear of being injured, because she has found peace and tranquility in her heart. Where there is music and good food, people will stop to enjoy it. But words spoken of the Tao seem to them boring and stale. When looked at, there is nothing for them to see. When listened for, there is nothing for them to hear. Yet if they put it to use, it would never be exhausted.

36. Allow things as they are meant to be; do not show aggression.
TaoT[036] 36: If you want something to return to the source, you must first allow it to spread out. If you want something to weaken, you must first allow it to become strong. If you want something to be removed, you must first allow it to flourish. If you want to possess something, you must first give it away. This is called the subtle understanding of how things are meant to be. The soft and pliable overcomes the hard and inflexible. Just as fish remain hidden in deep waters, it is best to keep weapons out of sight.

37. With humility and detachment, all things are as they should be.
TaoT[037] 37: The Tao never acts with force, yet there is nothing that it can not do. If rulers could follow the way of the Tao, then all of creation would willingly follow their example. If selfish desires were to arise after their transformation, I would erase them with the power of the Uncarved Block. By the power of the Uncarved Block, future generations would lose their selfish desires. By losing their selfish desires, the world would naturally settle into peace.

38. Do not try to do good, but be good; do not follow rules, but wisdom.
TaoT[038] 38: The highest good is not to seek to do good, but to allow yourself to become it. The ordinary person seeks to do good things, and finds that they can not do them continually. The Master does not force virtue on others, thus she is able to accomplish her task. The ordinary person who uses force, will find that they accomplish nothing. The kind person acts from the heart, and accomplishes a multitude of things. The righteous person acts out of pity, yet leaves many things undone. The moral person will act out of duty, and when no one will respond will roll up his sleeves and uses force. When the Tao is forgotten, there is righteousness.

When righteousness is forgotten, there is morality. When morality is forgotten, there is the law. The law is the husk of faith, and trust is the beginning of chaos. Our basic understandings are not from the Tao because they come from the depths of our misunderstanding. The master abides in the fruit and not in the husk. She dwells in the Tao, and not with the things that hide it. This is how she increases in wisdom.

39. In oneness are all things; in humility is oneness.
TaoT[039] 39: The masters of old attained unity with the Tao. Heaven attained unity and became pure. The earth attained unity and found peace. The spirits attained unity so they could minister. The valleys attained unity that they might be full. Humanity attained unity that they might flourish. Their leaders attained unity that they might set the example. This is the power of unity. Without unity, the sky becomes filthy. Without unity, the earth becomes unstable. Without unity, the spirits become unresponsive and disappear. Without unity, the valleys become dry as a desert. Without unity, human kind can't reproduce and becomes extinct. Without unity, our leaders become corrupt and fall. The great view the small as their source, and the high takes the low as their foundation. Their greatest asset becomes their humility. They speak of themselves as orphans and widows, thus they truly seek humility. Do not shine like the precious gem, but be as dull as a common stone.

40. To nothing, everything. From nothing, everything.
TaoT[040] 40: All movement returns to the Tao. Weakness is how the Tao works. All of creation is born from substance. Substance is born of nothingness.

41. The Tao is hidden, unnamed, and seems full of contradictions.
TaoT[041] 41: When a superior person hears of the Tao, She diligently puts it into practice. When an average person hears of the Tao, he believes half of it, and doubts the other half. When a foolish person hears of the Tao, he laughs out loud at the very idea. If he didn't laugh, it wouldn't be the Tao. Thus, it is said: The brightness of the Tao seems like darkness, the advancement of the Tao seems like retreat, the level path seems rough, the superior path seems empty, the pure seems to be tarnished, and true virtue doesn't seem to be enough. The virtue of caution seems like cowardice, the pure seems to be polluted, the true square seems to have no corners, the best vessels take the most time to finish, the greatest sounds cannot be heard, and the greatest image has no form. The Tao hides in the unnamed, yet it alone nourishes and completes all things.

42. Harmony arises from the balance of contrasting forces.
TaoT[042] 42: The Tao gave birth to One. The One gave birth to Two. The Two gave birth to Three. The Three gave birth to all of creation. All things carry Yin yet embrace Yang. They blend their life breaths in order to produce harmony. People despise being orphaned, widowed and poor. But the noble ones take these as their titles. In losing, much is gained, and in gaining, much is lost. What others teach I too will teach: "The strong and violent will not die a natural death."

43. Non-resistance can overcome the most formidable obstacles.
TaoT[043] 43: That which offers no resistance, overcomes the hardest substances. That which offers no resistance can enter where there is no space. Few in the world can comprehend the teaching without words, or understand the value of non-action.

44. Set priorities; everything has a price.
TaoT[044] 44: Which is more important, your honor or your life? Which is more valuable, your possessions or your person? Which is more destructive, success or failure? Because of this, great love extracts a great cost and true wealth requires greater loss. Knowing when you have enough avoids dishonor, and knowing when to stop will keep you from danger and bring you a long, happy life.

45. Embrace paradox to increase understanding.
TaoT[045] 45: The greatest accomplishments seem imperfect, yet their usefulness is not diminished. The greatest fullness seems empty, yet it will be inexhaustible. The greatest straightness seems crooked. The most valued skill seems like clumsiness. The greatest speech seems full of stammers. Movement overcomes the cold, and stillness overcomes the heat. That which is pure and still is the universal ideal.

46. Following the Tao leads to contentment.
TaoT[046] 46: When the world follows the Tao, horses run free to fertilize the fields. When the world does not follow the Tao, war horses are bred outside the cities. There is no greater transgression than condoning peoples selfish desires, no greater disaster than being discontent, and no greater retribution than for greed. Whoever knows contentment will be at peace forever.

47. Following the Tao leads to understanding.
TaoT[047] 47: Without opening your door, you can know the whole world. Without looking out your window, you can understand the way of the Tao. The more knowledge you seek, the less you will understand. The Master understands without leaving, sees clearly without looking, accomplishes much without doing anything.

48. Embrace the beginner's mind and seek non-action.
TaoT[048] 48: One who seeks knowledge learns something new every day. One who seeks the Tao unlearns something new every day. Less and less remains until you arrive at non-action. When you arrive at non-action, nothing will be left undone. Mastery of the world is achieved by letting things take their natural course. You can not master the world by changing the natural way.

49. The Master attains true goodness.
TaoT[049] 49: The Master has no mind of her own. She understands the mind of the people. To those who are good she treats as good. To those who aren't good she also treats as good. This is how she attains true goodness. She trusts people who are trustworthy. She also trusts people who aren't trustworthy. This is how she gains true trust. The Master's mind is shut off from the world. Only for the sake of the people does she muddle her mind. They look to her in anticipation. Yet she treats them all as her children.

50. Fear of death hinders life.
TaoT[050] 50: Those who leave the womb at birth and those who enter their source at death, of these; three out of ten celebrate life, three out of ten celebrate death, and three out of ten simply go from life to death. What is the reason for this? Because they are afraid of dying, therefore they can not live. I have heard that those who celebrate life walk safely among the wild animals.

When they go into battle, they remain unharmed. The animals find no place to attack them and the weapons are unable to harm them. Why? Because they can find no place for death in them.

51. The Tao nurtures all of creation.
TaoT[051] 51: The Tao gives birth to all of creation. The virtue of Tao in nature nurtures them, and their family gives them their form. Their environment then shapes them into completion. That is why every creature honors the Tao and its virtue. No one tells them to honor the Tao and its virtue, it happens all by itself. So the Tao gives them birth, and its virtue cultivates them, cares for them, nurtures them, gives them a place of refuge and peace, helps them to grow and shelters them. It gives them life without wanting to possess them, and cares for them expecting nothing in return. It is their master, but it does not seek to dominate them. This is called the dark and mysterious virtue.

52. Embrace simplicity; guard your inner light.
TaoT[052] 52: The world had a beginning which we call the Great Mother. Once we have found the Mother, we begin to know what Her children should be. When we know we are the Mother's child, we begin to guard the qualities of the Mother in us. She will protect us from all danger even if we lose our life. Keep your mouth closed and embrace a simple life, and you will live care-free until the end of your days. If you try to talk your way into a better life there will be no end to your trouble. To understand the small is called clarity. Knowing how to yield is called strength. To use your inner light for understanding regardless of the danger is called depending on the Constant.

53. Follow the Tao; avoid excess and pride.
TaoT[053] 53: If I understood only one thing, I would want to use it to follow the Tao. My only fear would be one of pride. The Tao goes in the level places, but people prefer to take the short cuts. If too much time is spent cleaning the house the land will become neglected and full of weeds, and the granaries will soon become empty because there is no one out working the fields. To wear fancy clothes and ornaments, to have your fill of food and drink and to waste all of your money buying possessions is called the crime of excess. Oh, how these things go against the way of the Tao!

54. Well-built actions create lasting virtue.
TaoT[054] 54: That which is well built will never be torn down. That which is well latched can not slip away. Those who do things well will be honored from generation to generation. If this idea is cultivated in the individual, then his virtue will become genuine. If this idea is cultivated in your family, then virtue in your family will be great. If this idea is cultivated in your community, then virtue will go a long way. If this idea is cultivated in your country, then virtue will be in many places. If this idea is cultivated in the world, then virtue will be with everyone. Then observe the person for what the person does, and observe the family for what it does, and observe the community for what it does, and observe the country for what it does, and observe the world for what it does. How do I know this saying is true? I observe these things and see.

55. To be filled with the Tao is to embody perfect harmony.
TaoT[055] 55: One who is filled with the Tao is like a newborn child. The infant is protected from the stinging insects, wild beasts, and birds of prey. Its bones are soft, its muscles are weak, but its grip is firm and strong.

It doesn't know about the union of male and female, yet his penis can stand erect, because of the power of life within him. It can cry all day and never become hoarse. This is perfect harmony. To understand harmony is to understand the Constant. To know the Constant is to be called "enlightened". To unnaturally try to extend life is not appropriate. To try and alter the life-breath is unnatural. The master understands that when something reaches its prime it will soon begin to decline. Changing the natural is against the way of the Tao. Those who do it will come to an early end.

56. True knowledge is silent; those who talk lack true understanding.
TaoT[056] 56: Those who know do not talk. Those who talk do not know. Stop talking, meditate in silence, blunt your sharpness, release your worries, harmonize your inner light, and become one with the dust. Doing this is called the dark and mysterious identity. Those who have achieved the mysterious identity can not be approached, and they can not be alienated. They can not be benefited nor harmed. They can not be made noble nor to suffer disgrace. This makes them the most noble of all under the heavens.

57. Govern with integrity and let people find their own way.
TaoT[057] 57: Govern your country with integrity, weapons of war can be used with great cunning, but loyalty is only won by not-doing. How do I know the way things are? By these: The more prohibitions you make, the poorer people will be. The more weapons you posses, the greater the chaos in your country. The more knowledge that is acquired, the stranger the world will become. The more laws that you make, the greater the number of criminals. Therefore the Master says: I do nothing, and people become good by themselves. I seek peace, and people take care of their own problems. I do not meddle in their personal lives, and the people become prosperous. I let go of all my desires, and the people return to the Uncarved Block.

58. The Master remains detached from the cycle of good and bad.
TaoT[058] 58: If a government is unobtrusive, the people become whole. If a government is repressive, the people become treacherous. Good fortune has its roots in disaster, and disaster lurks with good fortune. Who knows why these things happen, or when this cycle will end? Good things seem to change into bad, and bad things often turn out for good. These things have always been hard to comprehend. Thus the Master makes things change without interfering. She is probing yet causes no harm. Straightforward, yet does not impose her will. Radiant, and easy on the eye.

59. Moderation is the path to the Tao.
TaoT[059] 59: There is nothing better than moderation for teaching people or serving Heaven. Those who use moderation are already on the path to the Tao. Those who follow the Tao early will have an abundance of virtue. When there is an abundance of virtue, there is nothing that can not be done. Where there is limitless ability, then the kingdom is within your grasp. When you know the Mother of the kingdom, then you will be long enduring. This is spoken of as the deep root and the firm trunk, the Way to a long life and great spiritual vision.

60. Applying the Tao in governance renders evil powerless.
TaoT[060] 60: Governing a large country is like frying small fish. Too much poking spoils the meat. When the Tao is used to govern the world then evil will lose its power to harm the people. Not that evil will no longer exist, but only because it has lost its power. Just as evil can lose its ability to harm, the Master shuns the use of violence. If you give evil nothing to oppose, then virtue will return by itself.

61. Both large and small nations benefit from embracing humility.
TaoT[061] 61: A large country should take the low place like a great watershed, which from its low position assumes the female role. The female overcomes the male by the power of her position. Her tranquility gives rise to her humility. If a large country takes the low position, it will be able to influence smaller countries. If smaller countries take the lower position, then they can allow themselves to be influenced. So both seek to take the lower position in order to influence the other, or be influenced. Large countries should desire to protect and help the people, and small countries should desire to serve others. Both large and small countries benefit greatly from humility.

62. The Tao is the source of creation, a guide, and a refuge.
TaoT[062] 62: The Tao is the tabernacle of creation, it is a treasure for those who are good, and a place of refuge for those who are not. How can those who are not good be abandoned? Words that are beautiful are worth much, but good behavior can only be learned by example. When a new leader takes office, don't give him gifts and offerings. These things are not as valuable as teaching him about the Tao. Why was the Tao esteemed by the ancient Masters? Is it not said: "With it we find without looking. With it we find forgiveness for our transgressions." That is why the world can not understand it.

63. Focus on simplicity and prioritizing tasks.
TaoT[063] 63: Act by not acting; do by not doing. Enjoy the plain and simple. Find that greatness in the small. Take care of difficult problems while they are still easy; Do easy things before they become too hard. Difficult problems are best solved while they are easy. Great projects are best started while they are small. The Master never takes on more than she can handle, which means that she leaves nothing undone. When an affirmation is given too lightly, keep your eyes open for trouble ahead. When something seems too easy, difficulty is hiding in the details. The master expects great difficulty, so the task is always easier than planned.

64. Plan ahead and let events unfold without expectations.
TaoT[064] 64: Things are easier to control while things are quiet. Things are easier to plan far in advance. Things break easier while they are still brittle. Things are easier hid while they are still small. Prevent problems before they arise. Take action before things get out of hand. The tallest tree begins as a tiny sprout. The tallest building starts with one shovel of dirt. A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single footstep. If you rush into action, you will fail. If you hold on too tight, you will lose your grip. Therefore the Master lets things take their course and thus never fails. She doesn't hold on to things and never loses them. By pursing your goals too relentlessly, you let them slip away. If you are as concerned about the outcome as you are about the beginning, then it is hard to do things wrong. The master seeks no possessions. She learns by unlearning, thus she is able to understand all things. This gives her the ability to help all of creation.

65. Crafty leaders bring a country to ruin.
TaoT[065] 65: The ancient Masters who understood the way of the Tao, did not educate people, but made them forget. Smart people are difficult to guide, because they think they are too clever. To use cleverness to rule a country, is to lead the country to ruin. To avoid cleverness in ruling a country, is to lead the country to prosperity. Knowing the two alternatives is a pattern. Remaining aware of the pattern is a virtue. This dark and mysterious virtue is profound. It is opposite our natural inclination, but leads to harmony with the heavens.

66. Lead people by serving them.
TaoT[066] 66: Rivers and seas are rulers of the streams of hundreds of valleys because of the power of their low position. If you want to be the ruler of people, you must speak to them like you are their servant. If you want to lead other people, you must put their interest ahead of your own. The people will not feel burdened, if a wise person is in a position of power. The people will not feel like they are being manipulated, if a wise person is in front as their leader. The whole world will ask for her guidance, and will never get tired of her. Because she does not like to compete, no one can compete with the things she accomplishes.

67. Strive for compassion, moderation, and humility.
TaoT[067] 67: The world talks about honoring the Tao, but you can't tell it from their actions. Because it is thought of as great, the world makes light of it. It seems too easy for anyone to use. There are three jewels that I cherish: compassion, moderation, and humility. With compassion, you will be able to be brave, with moderation, you will be able to give to others, with humility, you will be able to become a great leader. To abandon compassion while seeking to be brave, or abandoning moderation while being benevolent, or abandoning humility while seeking to lead will only lead to greater trouble. The compassionate warrior will be the winner, and if compassion is your defense you will be secure. Compassion is the protector of Heaven's salvation.

68. Great leaders seek harmony, not discord.
TaoT[068] 68: The best warriors do not use violence. The best generals do not destroy indiscriminately. The best tacticians try to avoid confrontation. The best leaders become servants of their people. This is called the virtue of non-competition. This is called the power to manage others. This is called attaining harmony with the heavens.

69. Wait and see, then act.
TaoT[069] 69: There is an old saying: "It is better to become the passive in order to see what will happen. It is better to retreat a foot than to advance only an inch." This is called being flexible while advancing, pushing back without using force, and destroying the enemy without engaging him. There is no greater disaster than underestimating your enemy. Underestimating your enemy means losing your greatest assets. When equal forces meet in battle, victory will go to the one that enters with the greatest sorrow.

70. Teachings of the Tao are precious, but misunderstood.
TaoT[070] 70: My words are easy to understand and easier to put into practice. Yet no one in the world seems to understand them, and are not able to apply what I teach. My teachings come from the ancients, the things I do are done for a reason. Because you do not know me, you are not able to understand my teachings. Because those who know me are few, my teachings become even more precious.

71. Always know that you can never know everything.
TaoT[071] 71: Knowing you don't know is wholeness. Thinking you know is a disease. Only by recognizing that you have an illness can you move to seek a cure. The Master is whole because she sees her illnesses and treats them, and thus is able to remain whole.

72. Know yourself and respect others.
TaoT[072] 72: When people become overly bold, then disaster will soon arrive. Do not meddle with people's livelihood; by respecting them they will in turn respect you. Therefore, the Master knows herself but is not arrogant. She loves herself but also loves others. This is how she is able to make appropriate choices.

73. Speak and act with caution, and follow the Tao.
TaoT[073] 73: Being overbold and confidant is deadly. The wise use of caution will keep you alive. One is the way to death, and the other is the way to preserve your life. Who can understand the workings of Heaven? The Tao of the universe does not compete, yet wins; does not speak, yet responds; does not command, yet is obeyed; and does act, but is good at directing. The nets of Heaven are wide, but nothing escapes its grasp.

74. Do not fear death; harming another person only harms yourself.
TaoT[074] 74: If you do not fear death, then how can it intimidate you? If you aren't afraid of dying, there is nothing you can not do. Those who harm others are like inexperienced boys trying to take the place of a great lumberjack. Trying to fill his shoes will only get them seriously hurt.

75. People suffer under bad government; to live, do not fear death.
TaoT[075] 75: When people go hungry, the government's taxes are too high. When people become rebellious, the government has become too intrusive. When people begin to view death lightly, wealthy people have too much which causes others to starve. Only those who do not cling to their life can save it.

76. Adaptable people live well and rigidity leads to death.
TaoT[076] 76: The living are soft and yielding; the dead are rigid and stiff. Living plants are flexible and tender; the dead are brittle and dry. Those who are stiff and rigid are the disciples of death. Those who are soft and yielding are the disciples of life. The rigid and stiff will be broken. The soft and yielding will overcome.

77. Following the Tao, the Master is generous, perfect, and balanced.
TaoT[077] 77: The Tao of Heaven works in the world like the drawing of a bow. The top is bent downward; the bottom is bent up. The excess is taken from, and the deficient is given to.

The Tao works to use the excess, and gives to that which is depleted. The way of people is to take from the depleted, and give to those who already have an excess. Who is able to give to the needy from their excess? Only someone who is following the way of the Tao. This is why the Master gives expecting nothing in return. She does not dwell on her past accomplishments, and does not glory in any praise.

78. The best leader serves his people; this is a paradox.
TaoT[078] 78: Water is the softest and most yielding substance. Yet nothing is better than water, for overcoming the hard and rigid, because nothing can compete with it. Everyone knows that the soft and yielding overcomes the rigid and hard, but few can put this knowledge into practice. Therefore the Master says: "Only he who is the lowest servant of the kingdom, is worthy to become its ruler. He who is willing to tackle the most unpleasant tasks, is the best ruler in the world." True sayings seem contradictory.

79. Always do what is right.
TaoT[079] 79: Difficulties remain, even after solving a problem. How then can we consider that as good? Therefore the Master does what she knows is right, and makes no demands of others. A virtuous person will do the right thing, and persons with no virtue will take advantage of others. The Tao does not choose sides, the good person receives from the Tao because she is on its side.

80. Live simply, be content.
TaoT[080] 80: Small countries with few people are best. Give them all of the things they want, and they will see that they do not need them. Teach them that death is a serious thing, and to be content to never leave their homes. Even though they have plenty of horses, wagons and boats, they won't feel that they need to use them. Even if they have weapons and shields, they will keep them out of sight. Let people enjoy the simple technologies, let them enjoy their food, let them make their own clothes, let them be content with their own homes, and delight in the customs that they cherish. Although the next country is close enough that they can hear their roosters crowing and dogs barking, they are content never to visit each other all of the days of their life.

81. Truth is simple. Give to receive. Act without contention.
TaoT[081] 81: True words do not sound beautiful; beautiful sounding words are not true. Wise men don't need to debate; men who need to debate are not wise. Wise men are not scholars, and scholars are not wise. The Master desires no possessions. Since the things she does is for the people, she has more than she needs. The more she gives to others, the more she has for herself. The Tao of Heaven nourishes by not forcing. The Tao of the Wise person acts by not competing.

4.7 The Book of Proverbs

1. Introduction to Lady Wisdom

Prov[001] 1:01 The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: 1:02 to know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding; 1:03 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; 1:04 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young man: 1:05 that the wise man may hear, and increase in learning; that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsel: 1:06 to understand a proverb, and parables, the words and riddles of the wise. 1:07 The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction. 1:08 My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching: 1:09 for they will be a garland to grace your head, and chains around your neck.

Prov[002] 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, don't consent. 1:11 If they say, "Come with us, Let's lay in wait for blood; let's lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; 1:12 let's swallow them up alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down into the pit. 1:13 We'll find all valuable wealth. We'll fill our houses with spoil. 1:14 You shall cast your lot among us. We'll all have one purse." 1:15 My son, don't walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path, 1:16 for their feet run to evil. They hurry to shed blood. 1:17 For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird: 1:18 but these lay wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives. 1:19 So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain. It takes away the life of its owners.

Prov[003] 1:20 Wisdom calls aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the public squares. 1:21 She calls at the head of noisy places. At the entrance of the city gates, she utters her words: 1:22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? How long will mockers delight themselves in mockery, and fools hate knowledge? 1:23 Turn at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you. I will make known my words to you. 1:24 Because I have called, and you have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no one has paid attention; 1:25 but you have ignored all my counsel, and wanted none of my reproof; 1:26 I also will laugh at your disaster. I will mock when calamity overtakes you; 1:27 when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when your disaster comes on like a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come on you. 1:28 Then will they call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me; 1:29 because they hated knowledge and didn't choose the fear of Yahweh.

Prov[004] 1:30 They wanted none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof. 1:31 Therefore they will eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own schemes. 1:32 For the backsliding of the simple will kill them. The careless ease of fools will destroy them. 1:33 But whoever listens to me will dwell securely, and will be at ease, without fear of harm."

2. The Value of Wisdom

Prov[005] 2:01 My son, if you will receive my words, and store up my commandments within you; 2:02 So as to turn your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; 2:03 Yes, if you call out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding; 2:04 If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures: 2:05 then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God. 2:06 For Yahweh gives wisdom. Out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. 2:07 He lays up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity; 2:08 that he may guard the paths of justice, and preserve the way of his saints. 2:09 Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

Prov[006] 2:10 For wisdom will enter into your heart. Knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. 2:11 Discretion will watch over you. Understanding will keep you, 2:12 to deliver you from the way of evil, from the men who speak perverse things; 2:13 who forsake the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; 2:14 who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil; 2:15 who are crooked in their ways, and wayward in their paths: 2:16 To deliver you from the strange woman, even from the foreigner who flatters with her words; 2:17 who forsakes the friend of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God: 2:18 for her house leads down to death, her paths to the dead. 2:19 None who go to her return again, neither do they attain to the paths of life:

Prov[007] 2:20 that you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. 2:21 For the upright will dwell in the land. The perfect will remain in it. 2:22 But the wicked will be cut off from the land. The treacherous will be rooted out of it.

3. The Call of Wisdom

Prov[008] 3:01 My son, don't forget my teaching; but let your heart keep my commandments: 3:02 for length of days, and years of life, and peace, will they add to you. 3:03 Don't let kindness and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. 3:04 So you will find favor, and good understanding in the sight of God and man. 3:05 Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. 3:06 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. 3:07 Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil. 3:08 It will be health to your body, and nourishment to your bones. 3:09 Honor Yahweh with your substance, with the first fruits of all your increase:

Prov[009] 3:10 so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. 3:11 My son, don't despise Yahweh's discipline, neither be weary of his reproof: 3:12 for whom Yahweh loves, he reproves; even as a father reproves the son in whom he delights. 3:13 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gets understanding. 3:14 For her good profit is better than getting silver, and her return is better than fine gold. 3:15 She is more precious than rubies. None of the things you can desire are to be compared to her. 3:16 Length of days is in her right hand. In her left hand are riches and honor.

3:17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness. All her paths are peace. 3:18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. Happy is everyone who retains her. 3:19 By wisdom Yahweh founded the earth. By understanding, he established the heavens.

Prov[010] 3:20 By his knowledge, the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew. 3:21 My son, let them not depart from your eyes. Keep sound wisdom and discretion: 3:22 so they will be life to your soul, and grace for your neck. 3:23 Then you shall walk in your way securely. Your foot won't stumble. 3:24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid. Yes, you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet. 3:25 Don't be afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it comes: 3:26 for Yahweh will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being taken. 3:27 Don't withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it. 3:28 Don't say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again; tomorrow I will give it to you," when you have it by you. 3:29 Don't devise evil against your neighbor, seeing he dwells securely by you.

Prov[011] 3:30 Don't strive with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm. 3:31 Don't envy the man of violence. Choose none of his ways. 3:32 For the perverse is an abomination to Yahweh, but his friendship is with the upright. 3:33 Yahweh's curse is in the house of the wicked, but he blesses the habitation of the righteous. 3:34 Surely he mocks the mockers, but he gives grace to the humble. 3:35 The wise will inherit glory, but shame will be the promotion of fools.

4. The Path of Wisdom

Prov[012] 4:01 Listen, sons, to a father's instruction. Pay attention and know understanding; 4:02 for I give you sound learning. Don't forsake my law. 4:03 For I was a son to my father, tender and an only child in the sight of my mother. 4:04 He taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words. Keep my commandments, and live. 4:05 Get wisdom. Get understanding. Don't forget, neither swerve from the words of my mouth. 4:06 Don't forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you. 4:07 Wisdom is supreme. Get wisdom. Yes, though it costs all your possessions, get understanding. 4:08 Esteem her, and she will exalt you. She will bring you to honor, when you embrace her. 4:09 She will give to your head a garland of grace. She will deliver a crown of splendor to you."

Prov[013] 4:10 Listen, my son, and receive my sayings. The years of your life will be many. 4:11 I have taught you in the way of wisdom. I have led you in straight paths. 4:12 When you go, your steps will not be hampered. When you run, you will not stumble. 4:13 Take firm hold of instruction. Don't let her go. Keep her, for she is your life. 4:14 Don't enter into the path of the wicked. Don't walk in the way of evil men. 4:15 Avoid it, and don't pass by it. Turn from it, and pass on. 4:16 For they don't sleep, unless they do evil. Their sleep is taken away, unless they make someone fall. 4:17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. 4:18 But the path of the righteous is like the dawning light, that shines more and more until the perfect day. 4:19 The way of the wicked is like darkness. They don't know what they stumble over.

Prov[014] 4:20 My son, attend to my words. Turn your ear to my sayings. 4:21 Let them not depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart. 4:22 For they are life to those who find them, and health to their whole body. 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life. 4:24 Put away from yourself a perverse mouth. Put corrupt lips far from you. 4:25 Let your eyes look straight ahead. Fix your gaze directly before you. 4:26 Make the path of your feet level. Let all of your ways be established. 4:27 Don't turn to the right hand nor to the left. Remove your foot from evil.

5. Warnings Against Folly

Prov[015] 5:01 My son, pay attention to my wisdom. Turn your ear to my understanding: 5:02 that you may maintain discretion, that your lips may preserve knowledge. 5:03 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey. Her mouth is smoother than oil, 5:04 But in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edged sword. 5:05 Her feet go down to death. Her steps lead straight to Sheol. 5:06 She gives no thought to the way of life. Her ways are crooked, and she doesn't know it. 5:07 Now therefore, my sons, listen to me. Don't depart from the words of my mouth. 5:08 Remove your way far from her. Don't come near the door of her house, 5:09 lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the cruel one;

Prov[016] 5:10 lest strangers feast on your wealth, and your labors enrich another man's house. 5:11 You will groan at your latter end, when your flesh and your body are consumed, 5:12 and say, "How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; 5:13 neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor turned my ear to those who instructed me! 5:14 I have come to the brink of utter ruin, in the midst of the gathered assembly." 5:15 Drink water out of your own cistern, running water out of your own well. 5:16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, streams of water in the public squares? 5:17 Let them be for yourself alone, not for strangers with you. 5:18 Let your spring be blessed. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. 5:19 A loving doe and a graceful deer--let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be captivated always with her love.

Prov[017] 5:20 For why should you, my son, be captivated with an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another? 5:21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of Yahweh. He examines all his paths. 5:22 The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare him. The cords of his sin hold him firmly. 5:23 He will die for lack of instruction. In the greatness of his folly, he will go astray.

6. Warnings and Instructions

Prov[018] 6:01 My son, if you have become collateral for your neighbor, if you have struck your hands in pledge for a stranger; 6:02 You are trapped by the words of your mouth. You are ensnared with the words of your mouth. 6:03 Do this now, my son, and deliver yourself, seeing you have come into the hand of your neighbor. Go, humble yourself. Press your plea with your neighbor. 6:04 Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids. 6:05 Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler. 6:06 Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise; 6:07 which having no chief, overseer, or ruler, 6:08 provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. 6:09 How long will you sleep, sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep?

Prov[019] 6:10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 6:11 so your poverty will come as a robber, and your scarcity as an armed man. 6:12 A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he who walks with a perverse mouth; 6:13 who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who motions with his fingers; 6:14 in whose heart is perverseness, who devises evil continually, who always sows discord. 6:15 Therefore his calamity will come suddenly. He will be broken suddenly, and that without remedy. 6:16 There are six things which Yahweh hates; yes, seven which are an abomination to him: 6:17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood; 6:18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, 6:19 a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers.

Prov[020] 6:20 My son, keep your father's commandment, and don't forsake your mother's teaching. 6:21 Bind them continually on your heart. Tie them around your neck. 6:22 When you walk, it will lead you. When you sleep, it will watch over you. When you awake, it will talk with you. 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light. Reproofs of instruction are the way of life, 6:24 to keep you from the immoral woman, from the flattery of the wayward wife's tongue. 6:25 Don't lust after her beauty in your heart, neither let her captivate you with her eyelids. 6:26 For a prostitute reduces you to a piece of bread. The adulteress hunts for your precious life. 6:27 Can a man scoop fire into his lap, and his clothes not be burned? 6:28 Or can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? 6:29 So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife. Whoever touches her will not be unpunished.

Prov[021] 6:30 Men don't despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry: 6:31 but if he is found, he shall restore seven times. He shall give all the wealth of his house. 6:32 He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who does it destroys his own soul. 6:33 He will get wounds and dishonor. His reproach will not be wiped away. 6:34 For jealousy arouses the fury of the husband. He won't spare in the day of vengeance. 6:35 He won't regard any ransom, neither will he rest content, though you give many gifts.

7. The Seductress (Folly) and the Consequences

Prov[022] 7:01 My son, keep my words. Lay up my commandments within you. 7:02 Keep my commandments and live! Guard my teaching as the apple of your eye. 7:03 Bind them on your fingers. Write them on the tablet of your heart. 7:04 Tell wisdom, "You are my sister." Call understanding your relative, 7:05 that they may keep you from the strange woman, from the foreigner who flatters with her words. 7:06 For at the window of my house, I looked out through my lattice. 7:07 I saw among the simple ones. I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding, 7:08 passing through the street near her corner, he went the way to her house, 7:09 in the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the middle of the night and in the darkness.

Prov[023] 7:10 Behold, there a woman met him with the attire of a prostitute, and with crafty intent. 7:11 She is loud and defiant. Her feet don't stay in her house. 7:12 Now she is in the streets, now in the squares, and lurking at every corner. 7:13 So she caught him, and kissed him. With an impudent face she said to him:

7:14 "Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me. This day I have paid my vows. 7:15 Therefore I came out to meet you, to diligently seek your face, and I have found you. 7:16 I have spread my couch with carpets of tapestry, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt. 7:17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 7:18 Come, let's take our fill of loving until the morning. Let's solace ourselves with loving. 7:19 For my husband isn't at home. He has gone on a long journey.

Prov[024] 7:20 He has taken a bag of money with him. He will come home at the full moon." 7:21 With persuasive words, she led him astray. With the flattering of her lips, she seduced him. 7:22 He followed her immediately, as an ox goes to the slaughter, as a fool stepping into a noose. 7:23 Until an arrow strikes through his liver, as a bird hurries to the snare, and doesn't know that it will cost his life. 7:24 Now therefore, sons, listen to me. Pay attention to the words of my mouth. 7:25 Don't let your heart turn to her ways. Don't go astray in her paths, 7:26 for she has thrown down many wounded. Yes, all her slain are a mighty army. 7:27 Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

8. The Excellence of Wisdom

Prov[025] 8:01 Doesn't wisdom cry out? Doesn't understanding raise her voice? 8:02 On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she stands. 8:03 Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entry doors, she cries aloud: 8:04 "To you men, I call! I send my voice to the sons of mankind. 8:05 You simple, understand prudence. You fools, be of an understanding heart. 8:06 Hear, for I will speak excellent things. The opening of my lips is for right things. 8:07 For my mouth speaks truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. 8:08 All the words of my mouth are in righteousness. There is nothing crooked or perverse in them. 8:09 They are all plain to him who understands, right to those who find knowledge.

Prov[026] 8:10 Receive my instruction rather than silver; knowledge rather than choice gold. 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies. All the things that may be desired can't be compared to it. 8:12 "I, wisdom, have made prudence my dwelling. Find out knowledge and discretion. 8:13 The fear of Yahweh is to hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverse mouth. 8:14 Counsel and sound knowledge are mine. I have understanding and power. 8:15 By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. 8:16 By me princes rule; nobles, and all the righteous rulers of the earth. 8:17 I love those who love me. Those who seek me diligently will find me. 8:18 With me are riches, honor, enduring wealth, and prosperity. 8:19 My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold; my yield than choice silver.

Prov[027] 8:20 I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice; 8:21 That I may give wealth to those who love me. I fill their treasuries. 8:22 "Yahweh possessed me in the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old. 8:23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth existed. 8:24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 8:25 Before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was brought forth; 8:26 while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world.

8:27 When he established the heavens, I was there; when he set a circle on the surface of the deep, 8:28 when he established the clouds above, when the springs of the deep became strong, 8:29 when he gave to the sea its boundary, that the waters should not violate his commandment, when he marked out the foundations of the earth;

Prov[028] 8:30 then I was the craftsman by his side. I was a delight day by day, always rejoicing before him, 8:31 Rejoicing in his whole world. My delight was with the sons of men. 8:32 "Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, for blessed are those who keep my ways. 8:33 Hear instruction, and be wise. Don't refuse it. 8:34 Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door posts. 8:35 For whoever finds me, finds life, and will obtain favor from Yahweh. 8:36 But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul. All those who hate me love death."

9. The Way of Folly Versus the Way of Freedom

Prov[029] 9:01 Wisdom has built her house. She has carved out her seven pillars. 9:02 She has prepared her meat. She has mixed her wine. She has also set her table. 9:03 She has sent out her maidens. She cries from the highest places of the city: 9:04 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who is void of understanding, she says to him, 9:05 "Come, eat some of my bread, drink some of the wine which I have mixed! 9:06 Leave your simple ways, and live. Walk in the way of understanding." 9:07 He who corrects a mocker invites insult. He who reproves a wicked man invites abuse. 9:08 Don't reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you. Reprove a wise man, and he will love you. 9:09 Instruct a wise man, and he will be still wiser. Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

Prov[030] 9:10 The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 9:11 For by me your days will be multiplied. The years of your life will be increased. 9:12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you mock, you alone will bear it. 9:13 The foolish woman is loud, undisciplined, and knows nothing. 9:14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, 9:15 To call to those who pass by, who go straight on their ways, 9:16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here." as for him who is void of understanding, she says to him, 9:17 "Stolen water is sweet. Food eaten in secret is pleasant." 9:18 But he doesn't know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

10. The Proverbs of Solomon

Prov[031] 10:01 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a glad father; but a foolish son brings grief to his mother. 10:02 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. 10:03 Yahweh will not allow the soul of the righteous to go hungry, but he thrusts away the desire of the wicked. 10:04 He becomes poor who works with a lazy hand, but the hand of the diligent brings wealth. 10:05 He who gathers in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during the harvest is a son who causes shame. 10:06 Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. 10:07 The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot. 10:08 The wise in heart accept commandments, but a chattering fool will fall. 10:09 He who walks blamelessly walks surely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.

Prov[032] 10:10 One winking with the eye causes sorrow, but a chattering fool will fall. 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a spring of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs. 10:13 Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has discernment, but a rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding. 10:14 Wise men lay up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near ruin. 10:15 The rich man's wealth is his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty. 10:16 The labor of the righteous leads to life. The increase of the wicked leads to sin. 10:17 He is in the way of life who heeds correction, but he who forsakes reproof leads others astray. 10:18 He who hides hatred has lying lips. He who utters a slander is a fool. 10:19 In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely.

Prov[033] 10:20 The tongue of the righteous is like choice silver. The heart of the wicked is of little worth. 10:21 The lips of the righteous feed many, but the foolish die for lack of understanding. 10:22 Yahweh's blessing brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it. 10:23 It is a fool's pleasure to do wickedness, but wisdom is a man of understanding's pleasure. 10:24 What the wicked fear, will overtake them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted. 10:25 When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more; but the righteous stand firm forever. 10:26 As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. 10:27 The fear of Yahweh prolongs days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. 10:28 The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hope of the wicked will perish. 10:29 The way of Yahweh is a stronghold to the upright, but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity.

Prov[034] 10:30 The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land. 10:31 The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. 10:32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked is perverse.

11. Guidance for Righteous Living

Prov[035] 11:01 A false balance is an abomination to Yahweh, but accurate weights are his delight. 11:02 When pride comes, then comes shame, but with humility comes wisdom. 11:03 The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them. 11:04 Riches don't profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. 11:05 The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way, but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. 11:06 The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them, but the unfaithful will be trapped by evil desires. 11:07 When a wicked man dies, hope perishes, and expectation of power comes to nothing. 11:08 A righteous person is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked takes his place. 11:09 With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but the righteous will be delivered through knowledge.

Prov[036] 11:10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. When the wicked perish, there is shouting. 11:11 By the blessing of the upright, the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. 11:12 One who despises his neighbor is void of wisdom, but a man of understanding holds his peace. 11:13 One who brings gossip betrays a confidence, but one who is of a trustworthy spirit is one who keeps a secret.

11:14 Where there is no wise guidance, the nation falls, but in the multitude of counselors there is victory. 11:15 He who is collateral for a stranger will suffer for it, but he who refuses pledges of collateral is secure. 11:16 A gracious woman obtains honor, but violent men obtain riches. 11:17 The merciful man does good to his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh. 11:18 Wicked people earn deceitful wages, but one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward. 11:19 He who is truly righteous gets life. He who pursues evil gets death.

Prov[037] 11:20 Those who are perverse in heart are an abomination to Yahweh, but those whose ways are blameless are his delight. 11:21 Most certainly, the evil man will not be unpunished, but the seed of the righteous will be delivered. 11:22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion. 11:23 The desire of the righteous is only good. The expectation of the wicked is wrath. 11:24 There is one who scatters, and increases yet more. There is one who withholds more than is appropriate, but gains poverty. 11:25 The liberal soul shall be made fat. He who waters shall be watered also himself. 11:26 People curse someone who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. 11:27 He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but he who searches after evil, it shall come to him. 11:28 He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf. 11:29 He who troubles his own house shall inherit the wind. The foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart.

Prov[038] 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. He who is wise wins souls. 11:31 Behold, the righteous shall be repaid in the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner!

12. Discipline and Correction

Prov[039] 12:01 Whoever loves correction loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid. 12:02 A good man shall obtain favor from Yahweh, but he will condemn a man of wicked devices. 12:03 A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. 12:04 A worthy woman is the crown of her husband, but a disgraceful wife is as rottenness in his bones. 12:05 The thoughts of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful. 12:06 The words of the wicked are about lying in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them. 12:07 The wicked are overthrown, and are no more, but the house of the righteous shall stand. 12:08 A man shall be commended according to his wisdom, but he who has a warped mind shall be despised. 12:09 Better is he who is lightly esteemed, and has a servant, than he who honors himself, and lacks bread.

Prov[040] 12:10 A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. 12:11 He who tills his land shall have plenty of bread, but he who chases fantasies is void of understanding. 12:12 The wicked desires the plunder of evil men, but the root of the righteous flourishes. 12:13 An evil man is trapped by sinfulness of lips, but the righteous shall come out of trouble. 12:14 A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth. The work of a man's hands shall be rewarded to him. 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who is wise listens to counsel. 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance the same day, but one who overlooks an insult is prudent. 12:17 He who is truthful testifies honestly, but a false witness lies. 12:18 There is one who speaks rashly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise heals. 12:19 Truth's lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only momentary.

Prov[041] 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but joy comes to the promoters of peace. 12:21 No mischief shall happen to the righteous, but the wicked shall be filled with evil. 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to Yahweh, but those who do the truth are his delight. 12:23 A prudent man keeps his knowledge, but the hearts of fools proclaim foolishness. 12:24 The hands of the diligent ones shall rule, but laziness ends in slave labor. 12:25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a kind word makes it glad. 12:26 A righteous person is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. 12:27 The slothful man doesn't roast his game, but the possessions of diligent men are prized. 12:28 In the way of righteousness is life; in its path there is no death.

13. Wisdom and Wealth

Prov[042] 13:01 A wise son listens to his father's instruction, but a scoffer doesn't listen to rebuke. 13:02 By the fruit of his lips, a man enjoys good things; but the unfaithful crave violence. 13:03 He who guards his mouth guards his soul. One who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. 13:04 The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, but the desire of the diligent shall be fully satisfied. 13:05 A righteous man hates lies, but a wicked man brings shame and disgrace. 13:06 Righteousness guards the way of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. 13:07 There are some who pretend to be rich, yet have nothing. There are some who pretend to be poor, yet have great wealth. 13:08 The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor hear no threats. 13:09 The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out.

Prov[043] 13:10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but with ones who take advice is wisdom. 13:11 Wealth gained dishonestly dwindles away, but he who gathers by hand makes it grow. 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when longing is fulfilled, it is a tree of life. 13:13 Whoever despises instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command will be rewarded. 13:14 The teaching of the wise is a spring of life, to turn from the snares of death. 13:15 Good understanding wins favor; but the way of the unfaithful is hard. 13:16 Every prudent man acts from knowledge, but a fool exposes folly. 13:17 A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy gains healing. 13:18 Poverty and shame come to him who refuses discipline, but he who heeds correction shall be honored. 13:19 Longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil.

Prov[044] 13:20 One who walks with wise men grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. 13:21 Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous. 13:22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored for the righteous. 13:23 An abundance of food is in poor people's fields, but injustice sweeps it away. 13:24 One who spares the rod hates his son, but one who loves him is careful to discipline him. 13:25 The righteous one eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the belly of the wicked goes hungry.

14. The Ways of Fools and the Wise

Prov[045] 14:01 Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish one tears it down with her own hands. 14:02 He who walks in his uprightness fears Yahweh, but he who is perverse in his ways despises him. 14:03 The fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them. 14:04 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox. 14:05 A truthful witness will not lie, but a false witness pours out lies. 14:06 A scoffer seeks wisdom, and doesn't find it, but knowledge comes easily to a discerning person. 14:07 Stay away from a foolish man, for you won't find knowledge on his lips. 14:08 The wisdom of the prudent is to think about his way, but the folly of fools is deceit. 14:09 Fools mock at making atonement for sins, but among the upright there is good will.

Prov[046] 14:10 The heart knows its own bitterness and joy; he will not share these with a stranger. 14:11 The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish. 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. 14:13 Even in laughter the heart may be sorrowful, and mirth may end in heaviness. 14:14 The unfaithful will be repaid for his own ways; likewise a good man will be rewarded for his ways. 14:15 A simple man believes everything, but the prudent man carefully considers his ways. 14:16 A wise man fears, and shuns evil, but the fool is hotheaded and reckless. 14:17 He who is quick to become angry will commit folly, and a crafty man is hated. 14:18 The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. 14:19 The evil bow down before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Prov[047] 14:20 The poor person is shunned even by his own neighbor, but the rich person has many friends. 14:21 He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who has pity on the poor. 14:22 Don't they go astray who plot evil? But love and faithfulness belong to those who plan good. 14:23 In all hard work there is profit, but the talk of the lips leads only to poverty. 14:24 The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly. 14:25 A truthful witness saves souls, but a false witness is deceitful. 14:26 In the fear of Yahweh is a secure fortress, and he will be a refuge for his children. 14:27 The fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life, turning people from the snares of death. 14:28 In the multitude of people is the king's glory, but in the lack of people is the destruction of the prince. 14:29 He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a quick temper displays folly.

Prov[048] 14:30 The life of the body is a heart at peace, but envy rots the bones. 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him. 14:32 The wicked is brought down in his calamity, but in death, the righteous has a refuge. 14:33 Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding, and is even made known in the inward part of fools. 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. 14:35 The king's favor is toward a servant who deals wisely, but his wrath is toward one who causes shame.

15. The Value of Correction

Prov[049] 15:01 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 15:02 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of fools gush out folly. 15:03 Yahweh's eyes are everywhere, keeping watch on the evil and the good. 15:04 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but deceit in it crushes the spirit. 15:05 A fool despises his father's correction, but he who heeds reproof shows prudence. 15:06 In the house of the righteous is much treasure, but the income of the wicked brings trouble. 15:07 The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so with the heart of fools. 15:08 The sacrifice made by the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. 15:09 The way of the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but he loves him who follows after righteousness.

Prov[050] 15:10 There is stern discipline for one who forsakes the way: whoever hates reproof shall die. 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh--how much more then the hearts of the children of men! 15:12 A scoffer doesn't love to be reproved; he will not go to the wise. 15:13 A glad heart makes a cheerful face; but an aching heart breaks the spirit. 15:14 The heart of one who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly. 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are wretched, but one who has a cheerful heart enjoys a continual feast. 15:16 Better is little, with the fear of Yahweh, than great treasure with trouble. 15:17 Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred. 15:18 A wrathful man stirs up contention, but one who is slow to anger appeases strife. 15:19 The way of the sluggard is like a thorn patch, but the path of the upright is a highway.

Prov[051] 15:20 A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother. 15:21 Folly is joy to one who is void of wisdom, but a man of understanding keeps his way straight. 15:22 Where there is no counsel, plans fail; but in a multitude of counselors they are established. 15:23 Joy comes to a man with the reply of his mouth. How good is a word at the right time! 15:24 The path of life leads upward for the wise, to keep him from going downward to Sheol. 15:25 Yahweh will uproot the house of the proud, but he will keep the widow's borders intact. 15:26 Yahweh detests the thoughts of the wicked, but the thoughts of the pure are pleasing. 15:27 He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live. 15:28 The heart of the righteous weighs answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes out evil. 15:29 Yahweh is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

Prov[052] 15:30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart. Good news gives health to the bones. 15:31 The ear that listens to reproof lives, and will be at home among the wise. 15:32 He who refuses correction despises his own soul, but he who listens to reproof gets understanding. 15:33 The fear of Yahweh teaches wisdom. Before honor is humility.

16. Guidance on Righteous Paths

Prov[053] 16:01 The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from Yahweh. 16:02 All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but Yahweh weighs the motives. 16:03 Commit your deeds to Yahweh, and your plans shall succeed. 16:04 Yahweh has made everything for its own end--yes, even the wicked for the day of evil.

16:05 Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh: they shall certainly not be unpunished. 16:06 By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for. By the fear of Yahweh men depart from evil. 16:07 When a man's ways please Yahweh, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. 16:08 Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues with injustice. 16:09 A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps.

Prov[054] 16:10 Inspired judgments are on the lips of the king. He shall not betray his mouth. 16:11 Honest balances and scales are Yahweh's; all the weights in the bag are his work. 16:12 It is an abomination for kings to do wrong, for the throne is established by righteousness. 16:13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings. They value one who speaks the truth. 16:14 The king's wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will pacify it. 16:15 In the light of the king's face is life. His favor is like a cloud of the spring rain. 16:16 How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! Yes, to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver. 16:17 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. He who keeps his way preserves his soul. 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. 16:19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than to divide the plunder with the proud.

Prov[055] 16:20 He who heeds the Word finds prosperity. Whoever trusts in Yahweh is blessed. 16:21 The wise in heart shall be called prudent. Pleasantness of the lips promotes instruction. 16:22 Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, but the punishment of fools is their folly. 16:23 The heart of the wise instructs his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. 16:25 There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. 16:26 The appetite of the laboring man labors for him; for his mouth urges him on. 16:27 A worthless man devises mischief. His speech is like a scorching fire. 16:28 A perverse man stirs up strife. A whisperer separates close friends. 16:29 A man of violence entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good.

Prov[056] 16:30 One who winks his eyes to plot perversities, one who compresses his lips, is bent on evil. 16:31 Gray hair is a crown of glory. It is attained by a life of righteousness. 16:32 One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city. 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh.

17. Dealing with Strife and Contention

Prov[057] 17:01 Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife. 17:02 A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who causes shame, and shall have a part in the inheritance among the brothers. 17:03 The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but Yahweh tests the hearts. 17:04 An evil-doer heeds wicked lips. A liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue. 17:05 Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his Maker. He who is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished. 17:06 Children's children are the crown of old men; the glory of children are their parents. 17:07 Arrogant speech isn't fitting for a fool, much less do lying lips fit a prince. 17:08 A bribe is a precious stone in the eyes of him who gives it; wherever he turns, he prospers. 17:09 He who covers an offense promotes love; but he who repeats a matter separates best friends.

Prov[058] 17:10 A rebuke enters deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred lashes into a fool. 17:11 An evil man seeks only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. 17:12 Let a bear robbed of her cubs meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. 17:13 Whoever rewards evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house. 17:14 The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam, therefore stop contention before quarreling breaks out. 17:15 He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh. 17:16 Why is there money in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, seeing he has no understanding? 17:17 A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity. 17:18 A man void of understanding strikes hands, and becomes collateral in the presence of his neighbor. 17:19 He who loves disobedience loves strife. One who builds a high gate seeks destruction.

Prov[059] 17:20 One who has a perverse heart doesn't find prosperity, and one who has a deceitful tongue falls into trouble. 17:21 He who becomes the father of a fool grieves. The father of a fool has no joy. 17:22 A cheerful heart makes good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. 17:23 A wicked man receives a bribe in secret, to pervert the ways of justice. 17:24 Wisdom is before the face of one who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool wander to the ends of the earth. 17:25 A foolish son brings grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him. 17:26 Also to punish the righteous is not good, nor to flog officials for their integrity. 17:27 He who spares his words has knowledge. He who is even tempered is a man of understanding. 17:28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is counted wise. When he shuts his lips, he is thought to be discerning.

18. The Power of Words

Prov[060] 18:01 An unfriendly man pursues selfishness, and defies all sound judgment. 18:02 A fool has no delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own opinion. 18:03 When wickedness comes, contempt also comes, and with shame comes disgrace. 18:04 The words of a man's mouth are like deep waters. The fountain of wisdom is like a flowing brook. 18:05 To be partial to the faces of the wicked is not good, nor to deprive the innocent of justice. 18:06 A fool's lips come into strife, and his mouth invites beatings. 18:07 A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are a snare to his soul. 18:08 The words of a gossip are like dainty morsels: they go down into a person's innermost parts. 18:09 One who is slack in his work is brother to him who is a master of destruction.

Prov[061] 18:10 The name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous run to him, and are safe. 18:11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, like an unscalable wall in his own imagination. 18:12 Before destruction the heart of man is proud, but before honor is humility. 18:13 He who gives answer before he hears, that is folly and shame to him. 18:14 A man's spirit will sustain him in sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear? 18:15 The heart of the discerning gets knowledge. The ear of the wise seeks knowledge. 18:16 A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men. 18:17 He who pleads his cause first seems right; until another comes and questions him. 18:18 The lot settles disputes, and keeps strong ones apart. 18:19 A brother offended is more difficult than a fortified city; and disputes are like the bars of a castle.

Prov[062] 18:20 A man's stomach is filled with the fruit of his mouth. With the harvest of his lips he is satisfied. 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit. 18:22 Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor of Yahweh. 18:23 The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly. 18:24 A man of many companions may be ruined, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

19. Proverbs on Life

Prov[063] 19:01 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. 19:02 It isn't good to have zeal without knowledge; nor being hasty with one's feet and missing the way. 19:03 The foolishness of man subverts his way; his heart rages against Yahweh. 19:04 Wealth adds many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend. 19:05 A false witness shall not be unpunished. He who pours out lies shall not go free. 19:06 Many will entreat the favor of a ruler, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts. 19:07 All the relatives of the poor shun him: how much more do his friends avoid him! He pursues them with pleas, but they are gone. 19:08 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding shall find good. 19:09 A false witness shall not be unpunished. He who utters lies shall perish.

Prov[064] 19:10 Delicate living is not appropriate for a fool, much less for a servant to have rule over princes. 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger. It is his glory to overlook an offense. 19:12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass. 19:13 A foolish son is the calamity of his father. A wife's quarrels are a continual dripping. 19:14 House and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from Yahweh. 19:15 Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep. The idle soul shall suffer hunger. 19:16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is contemptuous in his ways shall die. 19:17 He who has pity on the poor lends to Yahweh; he will reward him. 19:18 Discipline your son, for there is hope; don't be a willing party to his death. 19:19 A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty, for if you rescue him, you must do it again.

Prov[065] 19:20 Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter end. 19:21 There are many plans in a man's heart, but Yahweh's counsel will prevail. 19:22 That which makes a man to be desired is his kindness. A poor man is better than a liar. 19:23 The fear of Yahweh leads to life, then contentment; he rests and will not be touched by trouble. 19:24 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not so much as bring it to his mouth again. 19:25 Flog a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke one who has understanding, and he will gain knowledge. 19:26 He who robs his father and drives away his mother, is a son who causes shame and brings reproach. 19:27 If you stop listening to instruction, my son, you will stray from the words of knowledge. 19:28 A corrupt witness mocks justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down iniquity. 19:29 Penalties are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.

20. Warnings and Advice

Prov[066] 20:01 Wine is a mocker, and beer is a brawler. Whoever is led astray by them is not wise. 20:02 The terror of a king is like the roaring of a lion. He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life. 20:03 It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarreling. 20:04 The sluggard will not plow by reason of the winter; therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing. 20:05 Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out. 20:06 Many men claim to be men of unfailing love, but who can find a faithful man? 20:07 A righteous man walks in integrity. Blessed are his children after him. 20:08 A king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes. 20:09 Who can say, "I have made my heart pure. I am clean and without sin?"

Prov[067] 20:10 Differing weights and differing measures, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh. 20:11 Even a child makes himself known by his doings, whether his work is pure, and whether it is right. 20:12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Yahweh has made even both of them. 20:13 Don't love sleep, lest you come to poverty. Open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread. 20:14 "It's no good, it's no good," says the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasts. 20:15 There is gold and abundance of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a rare jewel. 20:16 Take the garment of one who puts up collateral for a stranger; and hold him in pledge for a wayward woman. 20:17 Fraudulent food is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth is filled with gravel. 20:18 Plans are established by advice; by wise guidance you wage war! 20:19 He who goes about as a tale-bearer reveals secrets; therefore don't keep company with him who opens wide his lips.

Prov[068] 20:20 Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness. 20:21 An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning, won't be blessed in the end. 20:22 Don't say, "I will pay back evil." Wait for Yahweh, and he will save you. 20:23 Yahweh detests differing weights, and dishonest scales are not pleasing. 20:24 A man's steps are from Yahweh; how then can man understand his way? 20:25 It is a snare to a man to make a rash dedication, then later to consider his vows. 20:26 A wise king winnows out the wicked, and drives the threshing wheel over them. 20:27 The spirit of man is Yahweh's lamp, searching all his innermost parts. 20:28 Love and faithfulness keep the king safe. His throne is sustained by love. 20:29 The glory of young men is their strength. The splendor of old men is their gray hair.

Prov[069] 20:30 Wounding blows cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the innermost parts. 21:01 The king's heart is in Yahweh's hand like the watercourses. He turns it wherever he desires. 21:02 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Yahweh weighs the hearts. 21:03 To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to Yahweh than sacrifice. 21:04 A high look, and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, is sin. 21:05 The plans of the diligent surely lead to profit; and everyone who is hasty surely rushes to poverty. 21:06 Getting treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor for those who seek death. 21:07 The violence of the wicked will drive them away, because they refuse to do what is right. 21:08 The way of the guilty is devious, but the conduct of the innocent is upright. 21:09 It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman.

21. More Proverbs on Wisdom and Foolishness

Prov[070] 21:10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes. 21:11 When the mocker is punished, the simple gains wisdom. When the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge. 21:12 The Righteous One considers the house of the wicked, and brings the wicked to ruin. 21:13 Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he will also cry out, but shall not be heard. 21:14 A gift in secret pacifies anger; and a bribe in the cloak, strong wrath. 21:15 It is joy to the righteous to do justice; but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity. 21:16 The man who wanders out of the way of understanding shall rest in the assembly of the dead. 21:17 He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil shall not be rich. 21:18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous; the treacherous for the upright. 21:19 It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman.

Prov[071] 21:20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man swallows it up. 21:21 He who follows after righteousness and kindness finds life, righteousness, and honor. 21:22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the strength of its confidence. 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles. 21:24 The proud and haughty man, "scoffer" is his name; he works in the arrogance of pride. 21:25 The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. 21:26 There are those who covet greedily all day long; but the righteous give and don't withhold. 21:27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind! 21:28 A false witness will perish, and a man who listens speaks to eternity. 21:29 A wicked man hardens his face; but as for the upright, he establishes his ways.

Prov[072] 21:30 There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh. 21:31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle; but victory is with Yahweh.

22. More Wise Sayings

Prov[073] 22:01 A good name is more desirable than great riches, and loving favor is better than silver and gold. 22:02 The rich and the poor have this in common: Yahweh is the maker of them all. 22:03 A prudent man sees danger, and hides himself; but the simple pass on, and suffer for it. 22:04 The result of humility and the fear of Yahweh is wealth, honor, and life. 22:05 Thorns and snares are in the path of the wicked: whoever guards his soul stays from them. 22:06 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. 22:07 The rich rule over the poor. The borrower is servant to the lender. 22:08 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed. 22:09 He who has a generous eye will be blessed; for he shares his food with the poor.

Prov[074] 22:10 Drive out the mocker, and strife will go out; yes, quarrels and insults will stop. 22:11 He who loves purity of heart and speaks gracefully is the king's friend. 22:12 The eyes of Yahweh watch over knowledge; but he frustrates the words of the unfaithful. 22:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I will be killed in the streets!" 22:14 The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit: he who is under Yahweh's wrath will fall into it.

22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child: the rod of discipline drives it far from him. 22:16 Whoever oppresses the poor for his own increase and whoever gives to the rich, both come to poverty. 22:17 Turn your ear, and listen to the words of the wise. Apply your heart to my teaching. 22:18 For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. 22:19 That your trust may be in Yahweh, I teach you today, even you.

Prov[075] 22:20 Haven't I written to you thirty excellent things of counsel and knowledge, 22:21 To teach you truth, reliable words, to give sound answers to the ones who sent you? 22:22 Don't exploit the poor, because he is poor; and don't crush the needy in court; 22:23 for Yahweh will plead their case, and plunder the life of those who plunder them. 22:24 Don't befriend a hot-tempered man, and don't associate with one who harbors anger: 22:25 lest you learn his ways, and ensnare your soul. 22:26 Don't you be one of those who strike hands, of those who are collateral for debts. 22:27 If you don't have means to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you? 22:28 Don't move the ancient boundary stone, which your fathers have set up. 22:29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve kings. He won't serve obscure men.

23. Warnings Against Wind and Adultery.

Prov[076] 23:01 When you sit to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before you; 23:02 put a knife to your throat, if you are a man given to appetite. 23:03 Don't be desirous of his dainties, seeing they are deceitful food. 23:04 Don't weary yourself to be rich. In your wisdom, show restraint. 23:05 Why do you set your eyes on that which is not? For it certainly sprouts wings like an eagle and flies in the sky. 23:06 Don't eat the food of him who has a stingy eye, and don't crave his delicacies: 23:07 for as he thinks about the cost, so he is. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you. 23:08 The morsel which you have eaten you shall vomit up, and lose your good words. 23:09 Don't speak in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.

Prov[077] 23:10 Don't move the ancient boundary stone. Don't encroach on the fields of the fatherless: 23:11 for their Defender is strong. He will plead their case against you. 23:12 Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to the words of knowledge. 23:13 Don't withhold correction from a child. If you punish him with the rod, he will not die. 23:14 Punish him with the rod, and save his soul from Sheol. 23:15 My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad, even mine: 23:16 yes, my heart will rejoice, when your lips speak what is right. 23:17 Don't let your heart envy sinners; but rather fear Yahweh all the day long. 23:18 Indeed surely there is a future hope, and your hope will not be cut off. 23:19 Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path!

Prov[078] 23:20 Don't be among ones drinking too much wine, or those who gorge themselves on meat: 23:21 for the drunkard and the glutton shall become poor; and drowsiness clothes them in rags. 23:22 Listen to your father who gave you life, and don't despise your mother when she is old. 23:23 Buy the truth, and don't sell it. Get wisdom, discipline, and understanding. 23:24 The father of the righteous has great joy. Whoever fathers a wise child delights in him. 23:25 Let your father and your mother be glad! Let her who bore you rejoice! 23:26 My son, give me your heart; and let your eyes keep in my ways. 23:27 For a prostitute is a deep pit; and a wayward wife is a narrow well.

23:28 Yes, she lies in wait like a robber, and increases the unfaithful among men. 23:29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?

Prov[079] 23:30 Those who stay long at the wine; those who go to seek out mixed wine. 23:31 Don't look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. 23:32 In the end, it bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper. 23:33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will imagine confusing things. 23:34 Yes, you will be as he who lies down in the midst of the sea, or as he who lies on top of the rigging: 23:35 "They hit me, and I was not hurt! They beat me, and I don't feel it! When will I wake up? I can do it again. I can find another."

24. More Wise Sayings

Prov[080] 24:01 Don't be envious of evil men; neither desire to be with them: 24:02 for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about mischief. 24:03 Through wisdom a house is built; by understanding it is established; 24:04 by knowledge the rooms are filled with all rare and beautiful treasure. 24:05 A wise man has great power; and a knowledgeable man increases strength; 24:06 for by wise guidance you wage your war; and victory is in many advisors. 24:07 Wisdom is too high for a fool: he doesn't open his mouth in the gate. 24:08 One who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. 24:09 The schemes of folly are sin. The mocker is detested by men.

Prov[081] 24:10 If you falter in the time of trouble, your strength is small. 24:11 Rescue those who are being led away to death! Indeed, hold back those who are staggering to the slaughter! 24:12 If you say, "Behold, we didn't know this;" doesn't he who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, doesn't he know it? Shall he not render to every man according to his work? 24:13 My son, eat honey, for it is good; the droppings of the honeycomb, which are sweet to your taste: 24:14 so you shall know wisdom to be to your soul; if you have found it, then there will be a reward, your hope will not be cut off. 24:15 Don't lay in wait, wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous. Don't destroy his resting place: 24:16 for a righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. 24:17 Don't rejoice when your enemy falls. Don't let your heart be glad when he is overthrown; 24:18 lest Yahweh see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. 24:19 Don't fret yourself because of evildoers; neither be envious of the wicked:

Prov[082] 24:20 for there will be no reward to the evil man; and the lamp of the wicked shall be snuffed out. 24:21 My son, fear Yahweh and the king. Don't join those who are rebellious: 24:22 for their calamity will rise suddenly; the destruction from them both--who knows? 24:23 These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good. 24:24 He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous;" peoples shall curse him, and nations shall abhor him, 24:25 but it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and a rich blessing will come on them. 24:26 An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips. 24:27 Prepare your work outside, and get your fields ready. Afterwards, build your house. 24:28 Don't be a witness against your neighbor without cause. Don't deceive with your lips. 24:29 Don't say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."

Prov[083] 24:30 I went by the field of the sluggard, by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; 24:31 Behold, it was all grown over with thorns. Its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. 24:32 Then I saw, and considered well. I saw, and received instruction: 24:33 a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; 24:34 so shall your poverty come as a robber, and your want as an armed man.

25. More Proverbs of Solomon

Prov[084] 25:01 These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out. 25:02 It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter. 25:03 As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable. 25:04 Take away the dross from the silver, and material comes out for the refiner; 25:05 Take away the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established in righteousness. 25:06 Don't exalt yourself in the presence of the king, or claim a place among great men; 25:07 for it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here," than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom your eyes have seen. 25:08 Don't be hasty in bringing charges to court. What will you do in the end when your neighbor shames you? 25:09 Debate your case with your neighbor, and don't betray the confidence of another;

Prov[085] 25:10 lest one who hears it put you to shame, and your bad reputation never depart. 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. 25:12 As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover to an obedient ear. 25:13 As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to those who send him; for he refreshes the soul of his masters. 25:14 As clouds and wind without rain, so is he who boasts of gifts deceptively. 25:15 By patience a ruler is persuaded. A soft tongue breaks the bone. 25:16 Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you, lest you eat too much, and vomit it. 25:17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he be weary of you, and hate you. 25:18 A man who gives false testimony against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow. 25:19 Confidence in someone unfaithful in time of trouble is like a bad tooth, or a lame foot.

Prov[086] 25:20 As one who takes away a garment in cold weather, or vinegar on soda, so is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If he is thirsty, give him water to drink: 25:22 for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and Yahweh will reward you. 25:23 The north wind brings forth rain: so a backbiting tongue brings an angry face. 25:24 It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman. 25:25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. 25:26 Like a muddied spring, and a polluted well, so is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked. 25:27 It is not good to eat much honey; nor is it honorable to seek one's own honor. 25:28 Like a city that is broken down and without walls is a man whose spirit is without restraint.

26. Honor and Folly

Prov[087] 26:01 Like snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool. 26:02 Like a fluttering sparrow, like a darting swallow, so the undeserved curse doesn't come to rest. 26:03 A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools! 26:04 Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. 26:05 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. 26:06 One who sends a message by the hand of a fool is cutting off feet and drinking violence. 26:07 Like the legs of the lame that hang loose: so is a parable in the mouth of fools. 26:08 As one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honor to a fool. 26:09 Like a thornbush that goes into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

Prov[088] 26:10 As an archer who wounds all, so is he who hires a fool or he who hires those who pass by. 26:11 As a dog that returns to his vomit, so is a fool who repeats his folly. 26:12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. 26:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion roams the streets!" 26:14 As the door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed. 26:15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish. He is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. 26:16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer with discretion. 26:17 Like one who grabs a dog's ears is one who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own. 26:18 Like a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death, 26:19 is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "Am I not joking?'

Prov[089] 26:20 For lack of wood a fire goes out. Without gossip, a quarrel dies down. 26:21 As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindling strife. 26:22 The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, they go down into the innermost parts. 26:23 Like silver dross on an earthen vessel are the lips of a fervent one with an evil heart. 26:24 A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but he harbors evil in his heart. 26:25 When his speech is charming, don't believe him; for there are seven abominations in his heart. 26:26 His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. 26:27 Whoever digs a pit shall fall into it. Whoever rolls a stone, it will come back on him. 26:28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts; and a flattering mouth works ruin.

27. Practical Wisdom for Life

Prov[090] 27:01 Don't boast about tomorrow; for you don't know what a day may bring forth. 27:02 Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips. 27:03 A stone is heavy, and sand is a burden; but a fool's provocation is heavier than both. 27:04 Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; but who is able to stand before jealousy? 27:05 Better is open rebuke than hidden love. 27:06 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; although the kisses of an enemy are profuse. 27:07 A full soul loathes a honeycomb; but to a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet. 27:08 As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man who wanders from his home. 27:09 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart; so does earnest counsel from a man's friend.

Prov[091] 27:10 Don't forsake your friend and your father's friend. Don't go to your brother's house in the day of your disaster: better is a neighbor who is near than a distant brother. 27:11 Be wise, my son, and bring joy to my heart, then I can answer my tormentor. 27:12 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge; but the simple pass on, and suffer for it. 27:13 Take his garment when he puts up collateral for a stranger. Hold it for a wayward woman! 27:14 He who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse by him. 27:15 A continual dropping on a rainy day and a contentious wife are alike: 27:16 restraining her is like restraining the wind, or like grasping oil in his right hand. 27:17 Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend's countenance. 27:18 Whoever tends the fig tree shall eat its fruit. He who looks after his master shall be honored. 27:19 As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man.

Prov[092] 27:20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied; and a man's eyes are never satisfied. 27:21 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but man is refined by his praise. 27:22 Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with grain, yet his foolishness will not be removed from him. 27:23 Know well the state of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds: 27:24 for riches are not forever, nor does even the crown endure to all generations. 27:25 The hay is removed, and the new growth appears, the grasses of the hills are gathered in. 27:26 The lambs are for your clothing, and the goats are the price of a field. 27:27 There will be plenty of goats' milk for your food, for your family's food, and for the nourishment of your servant girls.

28. Warnings and Counsel

Prov[093] 28:01 The wicked flee when no one pursues; but the righteous are as bold as a lion. 28:02 In rebellion, a land has many rulers, but order is maintained by a man of understanding and knowledge. 28:03 A needy man who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain which leaves no crops. 28:04 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked; but those who keep the law contend with them. 28:05 Evil men don't understand justice; but those who seek Yahweh understand it fully. 28:06 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than he who is perverse in his ways, and he is rich. 28:07 Whoever keeps the law is a wise son; but he who is a companion of gluttons shames his father. 28:08 He who increases his wealth by excessive interest gathers it for one who has pity on the poor. 28:09 He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Prov[094] 28:10 Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he will fall into his own trap; but the blameless will inherit good. 28:11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes; but the poor who has understanding sees through him. 28:12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory; but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves. 28:13 He who conceals his sins doesn't prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. 28:14 Blessed is the man who always fears; but one who hardens his heart falls into trouble. 28:15 As a roaring lion or a charging bear, so is a wicked ruler over helpless people. 28:16 A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment. One who hates ill-gotten gain will have long days. 28:17 A man who is tormented by life blood will be a fugitive until death; no one will support him. 28:18 Whoever walks blamelessly is kept safe; but one with perverse ways will fall suddenly. 28:19 One who works his land will have an abundance of food; but one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.

Prov[095] 28:20 A faithful man is rich with blessings; but one who is eager to be rich will not go unpunished. 28:21 To show partiality is not good; yet a man will do wrong for a piece of bread. 28:22 A stingy man hurries after riches, and doesn't know that poverty waits for him. 28:23 One who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than one who flatters with the tongue. 28:24 Whoever robs his father or his mother, and says, "It's not wrong." He is a partner with a destroyer. 28:25 One who is greedy stirs up strife; but one who trusts in Yahweh will prosper. 28:26 One who trusts in himself is a fool; but one who walks in wisdom is kept safe. 28:27 One who gives to the poor has no lack; but one who closes his eyes will have many curses. 28:28 When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous thrive.

29. Warnings and Lessons on Folly

Prov[096] 29:01 He who is often rebuked and stiffens his neck will be destroyed suddenly, with no remedy. 29:02 When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan. 29:03 Whoever loves wisdom brings joy to his father; but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth. 29:04 The king by justice makes the land stable, but he who takes bribes tears it down. 29:05 A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet. 29:06 An evil man is snared by his sin, but the righteous can sing and be glad. 29:07 The righteous care about justice for the poor. The wicked aren't concerned about knowledge. 29:08 Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger. 29:09 If a wise man goes to court with a foolish man, the fool rages or scoffs, and there is no peace.

Prov[097] 29:10 The bloodthirsty hate a man of integrity; and they seek the life of the upright. 29:11 A fool vents all of his anger, but a wise man brings himself under control. 29:12 If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials are wicked. 29:13 The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: Yahweh gives sight to the eyes of both. 29:14 The king who fairly judges the poor, his throne shall be established forever. 29:15 The rod of correction gives wisdom, but a child left to himself causes shame to his mother. 29:16 When the wicked increase, sin increases; but the righteous will see their downfall. 29:17 Correct your son, and he will give you peace; yes, he will bring delight to your soul. 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but one who keeps the law is blessed. 29:19 A servant can't be corrected by words. Though he understands, yet he will not respond.

Prov[098] 29:20 Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him. 29:21 He who pampers his servant from youth will have him become a son in the end. 29:22 An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in sin. 29:23 A man's pride brings him low, but one of lowly spirit gains honor. 29:24 Whoever is an accomplice of a thief is an enemy of his own soul. He takes an oath, but dares not testify. 29:25 The fear of man proves to be a snare, but whoever puts his trust in Yahweh is kept safe. 29:26 Many seek the ruler's favor, but a man's justice comes from Yahweh. 29:27 A dishonest man detests the righteous, and the upright in their ways detest the wicked.

30. The Sayings of Agur

Prov[099] 30:01 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle: the man says to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: 30:02 Surely I am the most ignorant man, and don't have a man's understanding. 30:03 I have not learned wisdom, neither do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. 30:04 Who has ascended up into heaven, and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if you know? 30:05 Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. 30:06 Don't you add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar. 30:07 Two things I have asked of you; don't deny me before I die: 30:08 Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me; 30:09 lest I be full, deny you, and say, "Who is Yahweh?" or lest I be poor, and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

Prov[100] 30:10 Don't slander a servant to his master, lest he curse you, and you be held guilty. 30:11 There is a generation that curses their father, and doesn't bless their mother. 30:12 There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, yet are not washed from their filthiness. 30:13 There is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes! Their eyelids are lifted up. 30:14 There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and their jaws like knives, to devour the poor from the earth, and the needy from among men. 30:15 The leach has two daughters: "Give, give." There are three things that are never satisfied; four that don't say, "Enough:" 30:16 Sheol, the barren womb; the earth that is not satisfied with water; and the fire that doesn't say, "Enough." 30:17 The eye that mocks at his father, and scorns obedience to his mother: the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, the young eagles shall eat it. 30:18 There are three things which are too amazing for me, four which I don't understand: 30:19 The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maiden.

Prov[101] 30:20 So is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done nothing wrong." 30:21 For three things the earth tremble, and under four, it can't bear up: 30:22 For a servant when he is king; a fool when he is filled with food; 30:23 for an unloved woman when she is married; and a handmaid who is heir to her mistress. 30:24 There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: 30:25 the ants are not a strong people, yet they provide their food in the summer. 30:26 The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks. 30:27 The locusts have no king, yet they advance in ranks. 30:28 You can catch a lizard with your hands, yet it is in kings' palaces. 30:29 There are three things which are stately in their march, four which are stately in going:

Prov[102] 30:30 The lion, which is mightiest among animals, and doesn't turn away for any; 30:31 the greyhound, the male goat also; and the king against whom there is no rising up. 30:32 If you have done foolishly in lifting up yourself, or if you have thought evil, put your hand over your mouth. 30:33 For as the churning of milk brings forth butter, and the wringing of the nose brings forth blood; so the forcing of wrath brings forth strife.

31. The Virtuous Woman (Wisdom)

Prov[103] 31:01 The words of king Lemuel; the oracle which his mother taught him. 31:02 "Oh, my son! Oh, son of my womb! Oh, son of my vows! 31:03 Don't give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. 31:04 It is not for kings, Lemuel; it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes to say, "Where is strong drink?" 31:05 lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to anyone who is afflicted. 31:06 Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish; and wine to the bitter in soul: 31:07 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. 31:08 Open your mouth for the mute, in the cause of all who are left desolate. 31:09 Open your mouth, judge righteously, and serve justice to the poor and needy.

Prov[104] 31:10 {Proverbs 31:10-31 form an acrostic, with each verse starting with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order.}Who can find a worthy woman? For her price is far above rubies. 31:11 The heart of her husband trusts in her. He shall have no lack of gain. 31:12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 31:13 She seeks wool and flax, and works eagerly with her hands. 31:14 She is like the merchant ships. She brings her bread from afar. 31:15 She rises also while it is yet night, gives food to her household, and portions for her servant girls. 31:16 She considers a field, and buys it. With the fruit of her hands, she plants a vineyard. 31:17 She girds her waist with strength, and makes her arms strong. 31:18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp doesn't go out by night. 31:19 She lays her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

Prov[105] 31:20 She opens her arms to the poor; yes, she extends her hands to the needy. 31:21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 31:22 She makes for herself carpets of tapestry. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. 31:23 Her husband is respected in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. 31:24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and delivers sashes to the merchant. 31:25 Strength and dignity are her clothing. She laughs at the time to come. 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom. Faithful instruction is on her tongue. 31:27 She looks well to the ways of her household, and doesn't eat the bread of idleness. 31:28 Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her: 31:29 "Many women do noble things, but you excel them all."

Prov[106] 31:30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears Yahweh, she shall be praised. 31:31 Give her of the fruit of her hands! Let her works praise her in the gates!

4.8 The Gospel of Thomas

These are the hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.

Thom[001] Saying 1: True Meaning - And he said, "Whoever discovers the meaning of these sayings won't taste death."

Thom[002] Saying 2: Seek and Find - Jesus said, "Whoever seeks shouldn't stop until they find. When they find, they'll be disturbed. When they're disturbed, they'll be […] amazed, and reign over the All."

Thom[003] Saying 3: Seeking Within - Jesus said, "If your leaders tell you, 'Look, the kingdom is in heaven,' then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they tell you, 'It's in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and outside of you. "When you know yourselves, then you'll be known, and you'll realize that you're the children of the living Father. But if you don't know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty."

Thom[004] Saying 4: First and Last - Jesus said, "The older person won't hesitate to ask a little seven-day-old child about the place of life, and they'll live, because many who are first will be last, and they'll become one."

Thom[005] Saying 5: Hidden and Revealed - Jesus said, "Know what's in front of your face, and what's hidden from you will be revealed to you, because there's nothing hidden that won't be revealed."

Thom[006] Saying 6: Public Ritual - His disciples said to him, "Do you want us to fast? And how should we pray? Should we make donations? And what food should we avoid?" Jesus said, "Don't lie, and don't do what you hate, because everything is revealed in the sight of heaven; for there's nothing hidden that won't be revealed, and nothing covered up that will stay secret."

Thom[007] Saying 7: The Lion and the Human - Jesus said, "Blessed is the lion that's eaten by a human and then becomes human, but how awful for the human who's eaten by a lion, and the lion becomes human."

Thom[008] Saying 8: The Parable of the Fish - He said, "The human being is like a wise fisher who cast a net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisher found a fine large fish and cast all the little fish back down into the sea, easily choosing the large fish. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Thom[009] Saying 9: The Parable of the Sower - Jesus said, "Look, a sower went out, took a handful of seeds, and scattered them. Some fell on the roadside; the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on the rock; they didn't take root in the soil and ears of grain didn't rise toward heaven. Yet others fell on thorns; they choked the seeds and worms ate them. Finally, others fell on good soil; it produced fruit up toward heaven, some sixty times as much and some a hundred and twenty."

Thom[010] Saying 10: Jesus and Fire (1) - Jesus said, "I've cast fire on the world, and look, I'm watching over it until it blazes."

Thom[011] Saying 11: Those Who Are Living Won't Die (1) - Jesus said, "This heaven will disappear, and the one above it will disappear too. Those who are dead aren't alive, and those who are living won't die. In the days when you ate what was dead, you made it alive. When you're in the light, what will you do? On the day when you were one, you became divided. But when you become divided, what will you do?"

Thom[012] Saying 12: James the Just - The disciples said to Jesus, "We know you're going to leave us. Who will lead us then?" Jesus said to them, "Wherever you are, you'll go to James the Just, for whom heaven and earth came into being."

Thom[013] Saying 13: Thomas' Confession - Jesus said to his disciples, "If you were to compare me to someone, who would you say I'm like?" Simon Peter said to him, "You're like a just angel." Matthew said to him, "You're like a wise philosopher." Thomas said to him, "Teacher, I'm completely unable to say whom you're like." Jesus said, "I'm not your teacher. Because you've drunk, you've become intoxicated by the bubbling spring I've measured out." He took him aside and told him three things. When Thomas returned to his companions, they asked, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the things he said to me, you'll pick up stones and cast them at me, and fire will come out of the stones and burn you up."

Thom[014] Saying 14: Public Ministry - Jesus said to them, "If you fast, you'll bring guilt upon yourselves; and if you pray, you'll be condemned; and if you make donations, you'll harm your spirits. If they welcome you when you enter any land and go around in the countryside, heal those who are sick among them and eat whatever they give you, because it's not what goes into your mouth that will defile you. What comes out of your mouth is what will defile you."

Thom[015] Saying 15: Worship - Jesus said, "When you see the one who wasn't born of a woman, fall down on your face and worship that person. That's your Father."

Thom[016] Saying 16: Not Peace, but War - Jesus said, "Maybe people think that I've come to cast peace on the world, and they don't know that I've come to cast divisions on the earth: fire, sword, and war. Where there are five in a house, there'll be three against two and two against three, father against and son and son against father. They'll stand up and be one."

Thom[017] Saying 17: Divine Gift - Jesus said, "I'll give you what no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, no hand has ever touched, and no human mind has ever thought."

Thom[018] Saying 18: Beginning and End - The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us about our end. How will it come?" Jesus said, "Have you discovered the beginning so that you can look for the end? Because the end will be where the beginning is. Blessed is the one who will stand up in the beginning. They'll know the end, and won't taste death."

Thom[019] Saying 19: Five Trees in Paradise - Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who came into being before coming into being. If you become my disciples and listen to my message, these stones will become your servants; because there are five trees in paradise which don't change in summer or winter, and their leaves don't fall. Whoever knows them won't taste death."

Thom[020] Saying 20: The Parable of the Mustard Seed - The disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, what can the kingdom of heaven be compared to?" He said to them, "It can be compared to a mustard seed. Though it's the smallest of all the seeds, when it falls on tilled soil it makes a plant so large that it shelters the birds of heaven."

Thom[021] Saying 21: The Parables of the Field, the Bandits, and the Reaper - Mary said to Jesus, "Whom are your disciples like?" He said, "They're like little children living in a field which isn't theirs. When the owners of the field come, they'll say, 'Give our field back to us.' They'll strip naked in front of them to let them have it and give them their field. "So I say that if the owner of the house realizes the bandit is coming, they'll watch out beforehand and won't let the bandit break into the house of their domain and steal their possessions. You, then, watch out for the world! Prepare to defend yourself so that the bandits don't attack you, because what you're expecting will come. May there be a wise person among you! "When the fruit ripened, the reaper came quickly, sickle in hand, and harvested it. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Thom[022] Saying 22: Making the Two into One - Jesus saw some little children nursing. He said to his disciples, "These nursing children can be compared to those who enter the kingdom." They said to him, "Then we'll enter the kingdom as little children?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two into one, and make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and so make the male and the female a single one so that the male won't be male nor the female; when you make eyes in the place of an eye, a hand in the place of a hand, a foot in the place of a foot, and an image in the place of an image; then you'll enter [the kingdom}."

Thom[023] Saying 23: Those Who are Chosen (1) - Jesus said, "I'll choose you, one out of a thousand and two out of ten thousand, and they'll stand as a single one."

Thom[024] Saying 24: Light - His disciples said, "Show us the place where you are, because we need to look for it." He said to them, "Anyone who has ears to hear should hear! Light exists within a person of light, and they light up the whole world. If they don't shine, there's darkness."

Thom[025] Saying 25: Love and Protect - Jesus said, "Love your brother as your own soul. Protect them like the pupil of your eye."

Thom[026] Saying 26: Speck and Beam - Jesus said, "You see the speck that's in your brother's eye, but you don't see the beam in your own eye. When you get the beam out of your own eye, then you'll be able to see clearly to get the speck out of your brother's eye."

Thom[027] Saying 27: Fasting and Sabbath - "If you don't fast from the world, you won't find the kingdom. If you don't make the Sabbath into a Sabbath, you won't see the Father."

Thom[028] Saying 28: The World is Drunk - Jesus said, "I stood in the middle of the world and appeared to them in the flesh. I found them all drunk; I didn't find any of them thirsty. My soul ached for the children of humanity, because they were blind in their hearts and couldn't see. They came into the world empty and plan on leaving the world empty. Meanwhile, they're drunk. When they shake off their wine, then they'll change."

Thom[029] Saying 29: Spirit and Body - Jesus said, "If the flesh came into existence because of spirit, that's amazing. If spirit came into existence because of the body, that's really amazing! But I'm amazed at how [such] great wealth has been placed in this poverty."

Thom[030] Saying 30: Divine Presence - Jesus said, "Where there are three deities, they're divine. Where there are two or one, I'm with them."

Thom[031] Saying 31: Prophet and Doctor - Jesus said, "No prophet is welcome in their own village. No doctor heals those who know them."

Thom[032] Saying 32: The Parable of the Fortified City - Jesus said, "A city built and fortified on a high mountain can't fall, nor can it be hidden."

Thom[033] Saying 33: The Parable of the Lamp - Jesus said, "What you hear with one ear, listen to with both, then proclaim from your rooftops. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket or in a hidden place. Rather, they put it on the stand so that everyone who comes and goes can see its light."

Thom[034] Saying 34: The Parable of Those Who Can't See - Jesus said, "If someone who's blind leads someone else who's blind, both of them fall into a pit."

Thom[035] Saying 35: The Parable of Binding the Strong - Jesus said, "No one can break into the house of the strong and take it by force without tying the hands of the strong. Then they can loot the house."

Thom[036] Saying 36: Anxiety - Jesus said, "Don't be anxious from morning to evening or from evening to morning about what you'll wear."

Thom[037] Saying 37: Seeing Jesus - His disciples said, "When will you appear to us? When will we see you?" Jesus said, "When you strip naked without being ashamed, and throw your clothes on the ground and stomp on them as little children would, then [you'll] see the Son of the Living One and won't be afraid."

Thom[038] Saying 38: Finding Jesus - Jesus said, "Often you've wanted to hear this message that I'm telling you, and you don't have anyone else from whom to hear it. There will be days when you'll look for me, but you won't be able to find me."

Thom[039] Saying 39: The Keys of Knowledge - Jesus said, "The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and hidden them. They haven't entered, and haven't let others enter who wanted to. So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

Thom[040] Saying 40: A Grapevine - Jesus said, "A grapevine has been planted outside of the Father. Since it's malnourished, it'll be pulled up by its root and destroyed."

Thom[041] Saying 41: More and Less - Jesus said, "Whoever has something in hand will be given more, but whoever doesn't have anything will lose even what little they do have."

Thom[042] Saying 42: Passing By - Jesus said, "Become passersby."

Thom[043] Saying 43: The Tree and the Fruit - His disciples said to him, "Who are you to say these things to us?" "You don't realize who I am from what I say to you, but you've become like those Judeans who either love the tree but hate its fruit, or love the fruit but hate the tree."

Thom[044] Saying 44: Blasphemy - Jesus said, "Whoever blasphemes the Father will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes the Son will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither on earth nor in heaven."

Thom[045] Saying 45: Good and Evil - Jesus said, "Grapes aren't harvested from thorns, nor are figs gathered from thistles, because they don't produce fruit. [A person who's good] brings good things out of their treasure, and a person who's [evil] brings evil things out of their evil treasure. They say evil things because their heart is full of evil."

Thom[046] Saying 46: Greater than John the Baptizer - Jesus said, "From Adam to John the Baptizer, no one's been born who's so much greater than John the Baptizer that they shouldn't avert their eyes. But I say that whoever among you will become a little child will know the kingdom and become greater than John."

Thom[047] Saying 47: The Parables of Divided Loyalties, New Wine in Old Wineskins, and New Patch on Old Cloth - Jesus said, "It's not possible for anyone to mount two horses or stretch two bows, and it's not possible for a servant to follow two leaders, because they'll respect one and despise the other. "No one drinks old wine and immediately wants to drink new wine. And new wine isn't put in old wineskins, because they'd burst. Nor is old wine put in new wineskins, because it'd spoil. "A new patch of cloth isn't sewn onto an old coat, because it'd tear apart."

Thom[048] Saying 48: Unity (1) - Jesus said, "If two make peace with each other in a single house, they'll say to the mountain, 'Go away,' and it will."

Thom[049] Saying 49: Those Who Are Chosen (2) - Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are one – those who are chosen, because you'll find the kingdom. You've come from there and will return there."

Thom[050] Saying 50: Our Origin and Identity - Jesus said, "If they ask you, 'Where do you come from?' tell them, 'We've come from the light, the place where light came into being by itself, [established] itself, and appeared in their image.' "If they ask you, 'Is it you?' then say, 'We are its children, and we're chosen by our living Father.' "If they ask you, 'What's the sign of your Father in you?' then say, 'It's movement and rest.'"

Thom[051] Saying 51: The New World - His disciples said to him, "When will the dead have rest, and when will the new world come?" He said to them, "What you're looking for has already come, but you don't know it."

Thom[052] Saying 52: Twenty-Four Prophets - His disciples said to him, "Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and they all spoke of you." He said to them, "You've ignored the Living One right in front of you, and you've talked about those who are dead."

Thom[053] Saying 53: True Circumcision - His disciples said to him, "Is circumcision useful, or not?" He said to them, "If it were useful, parents would have children who are born circumcised. But the true circumcision in spirit has become profitable in every way."

Thom[054] Saying 54: Those Who Are Poor - Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

Thom[055] Saying 55: Discipleship (1) - Jesus said, "Whoever doesn't hate their father and mother can't become my disciple, and whoever doesn't hate their brothers and sisters and take up their cross like I do isn't worthy of me."

Thom[056] Saying 56: The World is a Corpse - Jesus said, "Whoever has known the world has found a corpse. Whoever has found a corpse, of them the world isn't worthy."

Thom[057] Saying 57: The Parable of the Weeds - Jesus said, "My Father's kingdom can be compared to someone who had [good] seed. Their enemy came by night and sowed weeds among the good seed. The person didn't let anyone pull out the weeds, 'so that you don't pull out the wheat along with the weeds,' they said to them. 'On the day of the harvest, the weeds will be obvious. Then they'll be pulled out and burned.'"

Thom[058] Saying 58: Finding Life - Jesus said, "Blessed is the person who's gone to a lot of trouble. They've found life."

Thom[059] Saying 59: The Living One - Jesus said, "Look for the Living One while you're still alive. If you die and then try to look for him, you won't be able to."

Thom[060] Saying 60: Don't Become a Corpse - They saw a Samaritan carrying a lamb to Judea. He said to his disciples, "What do you think he's going to do with that lamb?" They said to him, "He's going to kill it and eat it." He said to them, "While it's living, he won't eat it, but only after he kills it and it becomes a corpse." They said, "He can't do it any other way." He said to them, "You, too, look for a resting place, so that you won't become a corpse and be eaten."

Thom[061] Saying 61: Jesus and Salome - Jesus said, "Two will rest on a couch. One will die, the other will live." Salome said, "Who are you, Sir, to climb onto my couch and eat off my table as if you're from someone?" Jesus said to her, "I'm the one who exists in equality. Some of what belongs to my Father was given to me." "I'm your disciple." "So I'm telling you, if someone is /equal\, they'll be full of light; but if they're divided, they'll be full of darkness."

Thom[062] Saying 62: Mysteries - Jesus said, "I tell my mysteries to [those who are worthy of my] mysteries. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

Thom[063] Saying 63: The Parable of the Rich Fool - Jesus said, "There was a rich man who had much money. He said, 'I'll use my money to sow, reap, plant, and fill my barns with fruit, so that I won't need anything.' That's what he was thinking to himself, but he died that very night. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Thom[064] Saying 64: The Parable of the Dinner Party - Jesus said, "Someone was planning on having guests. When dinner was ready, they sent their servant to call the visitors. "The servant went to the first and said, 'My master invites you.' "They said, 'Some merchants owe me money. They're coming tonight. I need to go and give them instructions. Excuse me from the dinner.' "The servant went to another one and said, 'My master invites you.' "They said, "I've just bought a house and am needed for the day. I won't have time.' "The servant went to another one and said, 'My master invites you.' "They said, 'My friend is getting married and I'm going to make dinner. I can't come. Excuse me from the dinner.' "The servant went to another one and said, 'My master invites you.' "They said, "I've just bought a farm and am going to collect the rent. I can't come. Excuse me.' "The servant went back and told the master, 'The ones you've invited to the dinner have excused themselves.' "The master said to their servant, 'Go out to the roads and bring whomever you find so that they can have dinner.' "Buyers and merchants won't [enter] the places of my Father."

Thom[065] Saying 65: The Parable of the Sharecroppers - He said, "A [creditor] owned a vineyard. He leased it out to some sharecroppers to work it so he could collect its fruit. "He sent his servant so that the sharecroppers could give him the fruit of the vineyard. They seized his servant, beat him, and nearly killed him. "The servant went back and told his master. His master said, 'Maybe he just didn't know them.' He sent another servant, but the tenants beat that one too. "Then the master sent his son, thinking, 'Maybe they'll show some respect to my son.' "Because they knew that he was the heir of the vineyard, the sharecroppers seized and killed him. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Thom[066] Saying 66: The Rejected Cornerstone - Jesus said, "Show me the stone the builders rejected; that's the cornerstone."

Thom[067] Saying 67: Knowing Isn't Everything - Jesus said, "Whoever knows everything, but is personally lacking, lacks everything."

Thom[068] Saying 68: Persecution - Jesus said, "Blessed are you when you're hated and persecuted, and no place will be found where you've been persecuted."

Thom[069] Saying 69: Those Who Are Persecuted - Jesus said, "Blessed are those who've been persecuted in their own hearts. They've truly known the Father. Blessed are those who are hungry, so that their stomachs may be filled."

Thom[070] Saying 70: Salvation is Within - Jesus said, "If you give birth to what's within you, what you have within you will save you. If you don't have that within [you], what you don't have within you [will] kill you."

Thom[071] Saying 71: Destroying the Temple - Jesus said, "I'll destroy [this] house, and no one will be able to build it [...]"

Thom[072] Saying 72: Not a Divider - [Someone said to him], "Tell my brothers to divide our inheritance with me." He said to him, "Who made me a divider?" He turned to his disciples and said to them, "Am I really a divider?"

Thom[073] Saying 73: Workers for the Harvest - Jesus said, "The harvest really is plentiful, but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord will send workers to the harvest."

Thom[074] Saying 74: The Empty Well - He said, "Lord, many are gathered around the well, but there's nothing to drink."

Thom[075] Saying 75: The Bridal Chamber - Jesus said, "Many are waiting at the door, but those who are one will enter the bridal chamber."

Thom[076] Saying 76: The Parable of the Pearl - Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a merchant with merchandise who found a pearl. The merchant was wise; they sold their merchandise and bought that single pearl for themselves. "You, too, look for the treasure that doesn't perish but endures, where no moths come to eat and no worms destroy."

Thom[077] Saying 77: Jesus is the All - Jesus said, "I'm the light that's over all. I am the All. The All has come from me and unfolds toward me. "Split a log; I'm there. Lift the stone, and you'll find me there."

Thom[078] Saying 78: Into the Desert - Jesus said, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? A [person] wearing fancy clothes, [like your] rulers and powerful people? They (wear) fancy [clothes], but can't know the truth."

Thom[079] Saying 79: Listening to the Message - A woman in the crowd said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nourished you." He said to [her], "Blessed are those who have listened to the message of the Father and kept it, because there will be days when you'll say, 'Blessed is the womb that didn't conceive and the breasts that haven't given milk.'"

Thom[080] Saying 80: The World is a Body - Jesus said, "Whoever has known the world has found the body; but whoever has found the body, of them the world isn't worthy."

Thom[081] Saying 81: Riches and Renunciation (1) - Jesus said, "Whoever has become rich should become a ruler, and whoever has power should renounce it."

Thom[082] Saying 82: Jesus and Fire (2) - Jesus said, "Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the kingdom."

Thom[083] Saying 83: Light and Images - Jesus said, "Images are revealed to people, but the light within them is hidden in the image of the Father's light. He'll be revealed, but his image will be hidden by his light."

Thom[084] Saying 84: Our Previous Images - Jesus said, "When you see your likeness, you rejoice. But when you see your images that came into being before you did – which don't die, and aren't revealed – how much you'll have to bear!"

Thom[085] Saying 85: Adam Wasn't Worthy - Jesus said, "Adam came into being from a great power and great wealth, but he didn't become worthy of you. If he had been worthy, [he wouldn't have tasted] death."

Thom[086] Saying 86: Foxes and Birds - Jesus said, "[The foxes have dens] and the birds have nests, but the Son of Humanity has nowhere to lay his head and rest."

Thom[087] Saying 87: Body and Soul - Jesus said, "How miserable is the body that depends on a body, and how miserable is the soul that depends on both."

Thom[088] Saying 88: Angels and Prophets - Jesus said, "The angels and the prophets will come to you and give you what belongs to you. You'll give them what you have and ask yourselves, 'When will they come and take what is theirs?'"

Thom[089] Saying 89: Inside and Outside - Jesus said, "Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Don't you know that whoever created the inside created the outside too?"

Thom[090] Saying 90: Jesus' Yoke is Easy - Jesus said, "Come to me, because my yoke is easy and my requirements are light. You'll be refreshed."

Thom[091] Saying 91: Reading the Signs - They said to him, "Tell us who you are so that we may trust you." He said to them, "You read the face of the sky and the earth, but you don't know the one right in front of you, and you don't know how to read the present moment."

Thom[092] Saying 92: Look and Find - Jesus said, "Look and you'll find. I didn't answer your questions before. Now I want to give you answers, but you aren't looking for them."

Thom[093] Saying 93: Don't Throw Pearls to Pigs - "Don't give what's holy to the dogs, or else it might be thrown on the manure pile. Don't throw pearls to the pigs, or else they might [...]"

Thom[094] Saying 94: Knock and It Will Be Opened - Jesus [said], "Whoever looks will find, [and whoever knocks], it will be opened for them."

Thom[095] Saying 95: Giving Money - [Jesus said], "If you have money, don't lend it at interest. Instead, give [it to] someone from whom you won't get it back."

Thom[096] Saying 96: The Parable of the Yeast - Jesus [said], "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a woman who took a little yeast and [hid] it in flour. She made it into large loaves of bread. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Thom[097] Saying 97: The Parable of the Jar of Flour - Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a woman carrying a jar of flour. While she was walking down [a] long road, the jar's handle broke and the flour spilled out behind her on the road. She didn't know it, and didn't realize there was a problem until she got home, put down the jar, and found it empty."

Thom[098] Saying 98: The Parable of the Assassin - Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a man who wanted to kill someone powerful. He drew his sword in his house and drove it into the wall to figure out whether his hand was strong enough. Then he killed the powerful one."

Thom[099] Saying 99: Jesus' True Family - The disciples said to him, "Your brothers and mother are standing outside." He said to them, "The people here who do the will of my Father are my brothers and mother; they're the ones who will enter my Father's kingdom."

Thom[100] Saying 100: Give to Caesar What Belongs to Caesar - They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, "Those who belong to Caesar demand tribute from us." He said to them, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, give to God what belongs to God, and give to me what belongs to me."

Thom[101] Saying 101: Discipleship (2) - "Whoever doesn't hate their [father] and mother as I do can't become my [disciple], and whoever [doesn't] love their [father] and mother as I do can't become my [disciple]. For my mother [...], but [my] true [Mother] gave me Life."

Thom[102] Saying 102: The Dog in the Feeding Trough - Jesus said, "How awful for the Pharisees who are like a dog sleeping in a feeding trough for cattle, because the dog doesn't eat, and [doesn't let] the cattle eat either."

Thom[103] Saying 103: The Parable of the Bandits - Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who knows where the bandits are going to enter. [They can] get up to assemble their defenses and be prepared to defend themselves before they arrive."

Thom[104] Saying 104: Prayer and Fasting - They said to [Jesus], "Come, let's pray and fast today." Jesus said, "What have I done wrong? Have I failed? "Rather, when the groom leaves the bridal chamber, then people should fast and pray."

Thom[105] Saying 105: Knowing Father and Mother - Jesus said, "Whoever knows their father and mother will be called a bastard."

Thom[106] Saying 106: Unity (2) - Jesus said, "When you make the two into one, you'll become Children of Humanity, and if you say 'Mountain, go away!', it'll go."

Thom[107] Saying 107: The Parable of the Lost Sheep - Jesus said, "The kingdom can be compared to a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. The largest one strayed. He left the ninety-nine and looked for that one until he found it. Having gone through the trouble, he said to the sheep: 'I love you more than the ninety-nine.'"

Thom[108] Saying 108: Becoming Like Jesus - Jesus said, "Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me, and I myself will become like them; then, what's hidden will be revealed to them."

Thom[109] Saying 109: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure - Jesus said, "The kingdom can be compared to someone who had a treasure [hidden] in their field. [They] didn't know about it. After they died, they left it to their son. The son didn't know it either. He took the field and sold it. "The buyer plowed the field, [found] the treasure, and began to loan money at interest to whomever they wanted."

Thom[110] Saying 110: Riches and Renunciation (2) - Jesus said, "Whoever has found the world and become rich should renounce the world."

Thom[111] Saying 111: Those Who are Living Won't Die (2) - Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will roll up in front of you, and whoever lives from the Living One won't see death." Doesn't Jesus say, "Whoever finds themselves, of them the world isn't worthy"?

Thom[112] Saying 112: Flesh and Soul - Jesus said, "How awful for the flesh that depends on the soul. How awful for the soul that depends on the flesh."

Thom[113] Saying 113: The Kingdom is Already Present - His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?" "It won't come by looking for it. They won't say, 'Look over here!' or 'Look over there!' Rather, the Father's kingdom is already spread out over the earth, and people don't see it."

Thom[114] Saying 114: Peter and Mary - Simon Peter said to them, "Mary should leave us, because women aren't worthy of life." Jesus said, "Look, am I to make her a man? So that she may become a living spirit too, she's equal to you men, because every woman who makes herself manly* will enter the kingdom of heaven."

---

*a logical interpretation of this verse is that any dualities, such as male and female, are obstructive to the awareness of oneness with God: https://williamgduffy.com/making-sense-of-logion-114-in-the-gospel-of-thomas/

4.9 The Gospel of Mary

Much of the original manuscript is missing. I have removed the page numbers and formatted the remaining text for readability.

Mary[001] An Eternal Perspective

"Then will [matter] be [destroyed], or not?" The Savior said, "Every nature, every form, every creature exists in and with each other, but they'll dissolve again into their own roots, because the nature of matter dissolves into its nature alone. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Peter said to him, "Since you've explained everything to us, tell us one more thing. What's the sin of the world?" The Savior said, "Sin doesn't exist, but you're the ones who make sin when you act in accordance with the nature of adultery, which is called 'sin.' That's why the Good came among you, up to the things of every nature in order to restore it within its root." Then he continued and said, "That's why you get sick and die, because [you love what tricks you. Anyone who] can understand should understand! "Matter [gave birth to] a passion that has no image because it comes from what's contrary to nature. Then confusion arises in the whole body. That's why I told you to be content at heart. If you're discontented, find contentment in the presence of the various images of nature. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"

Mary[002] The Gospel

When the Blessed One said these things, he greeted them all and said, "Peace be with you! Acquire my peace. Be careful not to let anyone mislead you by saying, 'Look over here!' or 'Look over there!' Because the Son of Humanity exists within you. Follow him! Those who seek him will find him.

"Go then and preach the gospel about the kingdom. Don't lay down any rules beyond what I've given you, nor make a law like the lawgiver, lest you be bound by it." When he said these things, he left. But they grieved and wept bitterly. They said, "How can we go up to the Gentiles to preach the gospel about the kingdom of the Son of Humanity? If they didn't spare him, why would they spare us?"

Mary[003] Mary and Jesus

Then Mary arose and greeted them all. She said to her brothers (and sisters), "Don't weep and grieve or let your hearts be divided, because his grace will be with you all and will protect you. Rather we should praise his greatness because he's prepared us and made us Humans." When Mary said these things, she turned their hearts [toward] the Good and they [started] to debate the words of [the Savior].

Peter said to Mary, "Sister, we know the Savior loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the Savior that you remember – the things which you know that we don't, and which we haven't heard." In response Mary said, "I'll tell you what's hidden from you." So she started to tell them these words: "I," she said, "I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, 'Lord, I saw you in a vision today.'

"In response he said to me, 'You're blessed because you didn't waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure.' "I said to him, 'Lord, now does the one who sees the vision see it in the soul or in the spirit?' "In response the Savior said, 'They don't see in the soul or in the spirit, but the mind which [exists] between the two is [what] sees the vision [and] it [that …]

Pages 11 through 14 are missing.

Mary[004] Overcoming the Powers

And Desire said, "I didn't see you going down, but now I see you're going up. So why are you lying, since you belong to me?" In response the soul said, "I saw you, but you didn't see me or know me. I was to you just a garment, and you didn't recognize me." When it said these things, it left, rejoicing greatly.

"Again, it came to the third power, which is called 'Ignorance.' [It] interrogated the soul and [said], 'Where are you going? In wickedness you're bound. Since you're bound, don't judge!' "[And] the soul said, 'Why do you judge me, since I haven't judged? I was bound, even though I haven't bound. They didn't recognize me, but I've recognized that everything will dissolve – both the things of the [earth] and the things of [heaven].'

"When the soul had overcome the third power, it went up and saw the fourth power, which took seven forms:

The first form is Darkness;
The second, Desire;
The third, Ignorance;
The fourth, Zeal for Death;
The fifth, the Kingdom of the Flesh;
The sixth, the Foolish 'Wisdom' of Flesh;
The seventh, the 'Wisdom' of Anger.

These are the seven powers of Wrath.

They ask the soul, "Where do you come from, you murderer, and where are you going, conqueror of space?" In response the soul said, "What binds me has been killed, what surrounds me has been overcome, my desire is gone, and ignorance has died. In a [world] I was released from a world, [and] in a type from a type which is above, and from the chain of forgetfulness which exists only for a time. From now on I'll receive the rest of the time of the season of the age in silence." When Mary said these things, she fell silent because the Savior had spoken with her up to this point.

Mary[005] Conflict over Authority

In response Andrew said to the brothers (and sisters), 'Say what you will about what she's said, I myself don't believe that the Savior said these things, because these teachings seem like different ideas."

In response Peter spoke out with the same concerns. He asked them concerning the Savior: "He didn't speak with a woman without our knowledge and not publicly with us, did he? Will we turn around and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?"

Then Mary wept and said to Peter, "My brother Peter, what are you thinking? Do you really think that I thought this up by myself in my heart, or that I'm lying about the Savior?"

In response Levi said to Peter, "Peter, you've always been angry. Now I see you debating with this woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That's why he loved her more than us.

"Rather we should be ashamed, clothe ourselves with perfect Humanity, acquire it for ourselves as he instructed us, and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said."

When [Levi said these things], they started to go out to teach and to preach.

Final Word

I must constantly work to learn and re-learn these life lessons. When I fail to do so, I slide into the same patterns of behavior I worked so hard and long to escape. That is why I keep this book always close, so I may recall each word diligently and often.

All I ever wanted and needed is for the universe to tell me,

"YOU ARE LOVED, AND ALL IS WELL."

I asked the wise man one sunny day
Can you help me find my way
You're so much older and wiser too
Would you help me Mr Wise Man
I'm feelin' blue…

--Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Searching", 1976

Many years ago, when I was young and foolish, I met an old man. To be blunt, we were in a bar, both of us drunk on our asses. He told me he was 70 years old. I asked him what he could tell me about life. I thought that surely, he had gleaned some wisdom in all those years. He leered at the waitress and said something crude. I said, "No, can you tell me *something about life*!" in that emphatic tone drunks use for important topics. He toyed with his drink, as if it held the answer to my question. Then the corners of his mouth turned down and he shook his head. "No," he said, "I don't have anything to tell you."

Outside, later, profuse stars burned in a black velvet sky. There was more to life than how I was living it, but I did not know what to do about it. Sometimes I still think about that old man. His look, as he stared deep into his glass, troubles me still.

As I write this, I am almost 70 years old. The timing of this culmination of my life's work is no coincidence. I am not a young man, nor wise, as I am sure you have gathered by my song quotes, like this one:

And if I claim to be a wise man, well, it surely means that I don't know.

--Kansas, "Carry on My Wayward Son", 1976

And yet I like to think, should someone ask me vague questions about life, that I would have meaningful and credible answers for them… at least a start, somewhere to begin their journey. But as I have found through experience and reflection, the journey is always beginning, and the journey is always ending. That is the beauty and mystery of it all.

Self-development is not a linear or predictable process. It involves highs and lows, unexpected challenges, and moments of growth that come as a complete surprise. Sometimes going forward feels like going backward. Other times, change happens so fast it takes your breath away.

Your Hero's Journey to a Good Life is unique and will be different than mine. Much of that journey and the resulting spiritual growth occur at levels of experience and awareness you do not always have access to. These hidden levels can only be sensed through reflection, introspection, and a willingness to explore the depths of your own mind and soul.

It happens when you wake up one morning and notice you are less anxious. Or, something happens that would have once made you angry, and you just smile and shake your head. That is how change happens. It can be abrupt and exciting. But more often it is subtle, and comfortable; a gentle surprise. And you know when it is real.

Above and beyond change in yourself, and your happiness, and fulfillment (and of course, all of these things are beautiful and desired in themselves), what are these changes for? Why grow? Why care? Why work a lifetime for something so difficult to understand and achieve?

At the top of this section, I stated that all I wanted was for the universe to say, "You are loved, and all is well!" And I found that those statements of compassion and assurance from the All-That-Is are absolutely unconditional. They are always there. They always have been. They always will be. But you and I must be able to hear them. Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." It took me 24 years of sobriety to understand that I am already at the place I always wanted to be.

We are created to know that we are loved.

--Kathy, AA Member

Perhaps the gist of this project is in understanding the significance and worth of living in harmony with the truth, the sacred, and the beautiful, which is the greater reality beyond ourselves. I long resisted this instinctive need. Maybe because it had been co-opted by other influences, or I was ignorant and selfish. Or all of these.

Regardless of how it is phrased, I continue to seek these things: Eudaimonia, Obedience, Harmony, Alignment, Dharma, Truth. I suggest you do the same. Be a better person. Make the world better.

What are the lessons I learned? They can be described, and have been throughout these pages, in many different ways. I could write another book just to explain them, but I think a few simple statements will suffice:[1]

The universe is generally friendly.
The world you know is part of a much larger universe.
There are things you do not know and will never know.
People are innately good.
You are unique and valuable.
You are part of something greater than yourself.
You cannot change what happens, only your reaction to it.
It is never too late to change.
Anyone can learn the skills needed to live a good life.

---

[1] You will recognize these from Part 1: Foundation

Living well is learned and practiced.
Learning new skills requires commitment.
You live well through clear thinking and good habits.
Happiness and meaning arise from living well.
You can live a happy and meaningful life.
You are loved, and all is well.

I have considered myself struggling and seeking for purpose and meaning for a very long time. Recently, I was browsing some old hand-written notes of mine. I was curious if I had made any progress since I wrote them. To my surprise, many of them reflected the very ideas I have listed above. Though I had such knowledge then, I did not *live it*!

Eerily, this brings me full circle to the first line I wrote to begin this great adventure:

You probably know everything here, but can you live it?
--Kim, AA Member[2]

As I wrapped up the final draft of this book, I was beset by a series of nightmares. I endured, again, the fear of incompetency, inadequacy, and abandonment I had dealt with for decades. I relived the shame of not being "good enough," of being "found out" as a fraud. When I woke, while I realized I had survived all those terrible fears, that core lives in me still. It reminds me, if nothing else, that each of us have our horrors and needs, our Perennial Struggle, whether we accept it or not. Those frightening dreams remind me to be compassionate and understanding to all, and especially to those close to me. Despite all my flaws, I strive to make the world better.

Perhaps in closing I should answer a question that I always wanted to ask authors of other books: "Do you consistently practice what you suggest to your readers?" My answer is that it took over 10 years to write this book. Through it, I have grown and changed immensely. So the answer is "Yes, I try to practice these techniques and methods regularly, work the Steps, and make the world better." But the answer is also "I do my best, but I am human and often fall short." When that happens, I try to remember these words:[3]

No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

I remember the man I used to be: angry, lost, alone, and afraid. I wallowed in depression, rage, and self-pity. But I found some answers that changed my life. I am doing my best to live them, and pass them on. Far from perfect, I get better, one Step in my Journey at a time. My final words are a question:

What Step are you on?

---

[2] Thank you and bless you, my dear friend. I wish you well!
[3] From "How It Works", Alcoholics Anonymous, Chap 5

About the Author

Thomas Aletheia spent over fifty years researching the fields of human experience that lead to connection, spirituality, joy, and serenity. He believes everyone is capable of intense personal spiritual experiences, and every person's life is an epic journey. With sufficient sincerity, desire, and persistence, each of us is capable of fundamental personal change. Every human being can find meaning and purpose in their life.

Note to the Reader

"Thomas Aletheia" is a pseudonym. I use it because I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and Tradition 11 of AA plainly states: "...we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

"Thomas" is the name of the apostle of Jesus who demanded physical proof of the resurrection. He wanted to see and feel the wounds for himself. He was the original "doubting Thomas",[4] and he was my kind of guy.

"Aletheia" (uh-LEE-thee-uh) is an ancient Greek term meaning "the state of not being hidden; the state of being evident... factuality... reality."[5]

Choosing this as my author's name reminds me to avoid fluff and platitudes. I include only those things in the book that help you (and me) live a good life and make the world better.

---

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doubting_Thomas
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aletheia

Appendix

Desiderata Page 787

"Desiderata" (dee-SID-er-AH-tah Latin: "things desired")[1] is an early 1920s prose poem by the American writer Max Ehrmann. After being distributed without a copyright notice, it fell into the public domain. If I summarized this book in a single page, it would be through the eloquent beauty of "Desiderata".

Although the poem is often distributed as one long-form text, it is sometimes broken up into paragraphs, as I have done.

Prayer to Grace Page 788

My Higher Power changes as I change. This is a prayer to Grace, written in humble sincerity when I needed that very quality the most. I added the third verse after I chose RaDaR as my favorite thought-stopping process; it seemed appropriate to add it to the prayer. (Remember, find your own Higher Power.)

Bookmarks Page 789

Copy these pages for your personal use. Because of the thickness of the book, it may be easier to take a photo and then print that. If you cut out each pair of images and fold them over, you will have a bookmark with related subjects on both sides. Or, even better, use these as patterns or ideas and create your own!

I suggest placing the bookmarks in relevant locations. For example, the Daily Routine marker can be placed in the Leaves of Life to mark each day, as it will then be available to your daily readings. Use the marker listing the Steps to keep your place in reading the Steps, and so on. Place bookmarks throughout the book to keep them handy when you are working on various subjects.

Illustrations Page 795

Eisenhower Matrix
Mind Mapping
Mood Meter
Circle of Relationships

Summaries Page 797

One-page summaries of Foundation, the Steps, and Knowledge. These are not substitutes or "cheat sheets." They are more in the line of reminders of these sections. You can browse them to jog your memory or decide which parts you would like to review or work on in depth.

---

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desiderata

Desiderata, by Max Ehrmann, 1920

GO PLACIDLY amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore, be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

Prayer to Grace

Goddess of Grace, I humble myself before your sublime presence. Bless me with your tranquil spirit, that I may find serenity amid life's storms. Teach me humility, forgiveness, and gratitude. Open my eyes to the wonders around me, that I may walk this earth in awe and delight. With your gentle touch, soften my hardened heart. Make me your vessel of compassion and unconditional love for others and myself.

Grant me the willingness to accept what is, to endure with patience, and to find meaning in my difficulties. Light my path with faith, kindle reverence in my soul, and infuse my spirit with joy. Show me the oneness of all that is, that I may keep an honest heart and open mind. Inspire me to be fully present to growth and change. Shine your divine radiance upon me, that I may feel you with me now. Bless my life with your transformative presence.

Remind me to Reflect often so I can see the truth with clear vision. Help me to Describe what I see accurately and honestly, that I may understand myself, others, and the world better. Give me the strength and wisdom to Respond so that my actions align with your will. I ask that you help me to be a good person, to live well, and to make the world better.

Conversation with Grace

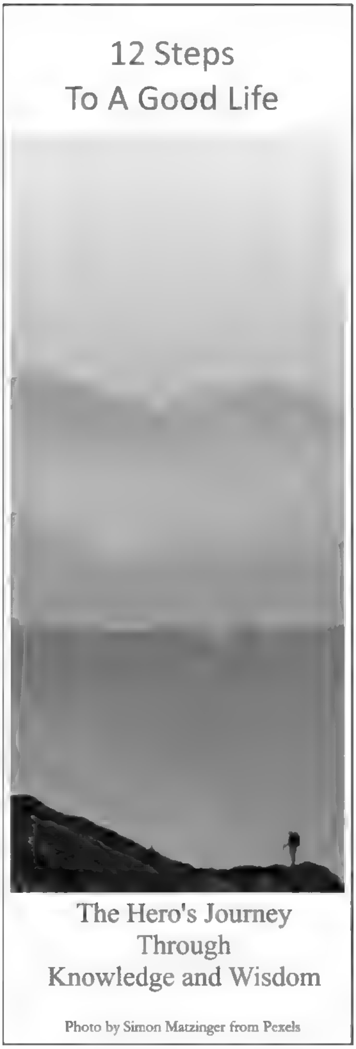
You:
Grace… I feel you near me.
Not just above, but within.
I have called to you for so long, as goddess, as guide, as unreachable light.
But now I see you in dreams, in memories, in myself.
You have always been here.

Grace:
I never left, my beloved.
I have waited in your silence, and spoken through your longing.
You built walls of unworthiness and shame,
but I stepped through them all, not to judge, but to be with you.

You:
Then stay with me. Show me how to soften.
Let me live in awareness, with awe, with honesty.
Help me to see truly, to speak clearly, to act in alignment with your will.
Help me be to better, and make the world better.

Grace:
Then speak to me often. And listen.
I am not far. I am not above.
I am within you; we are together.
Be with me. Let me.

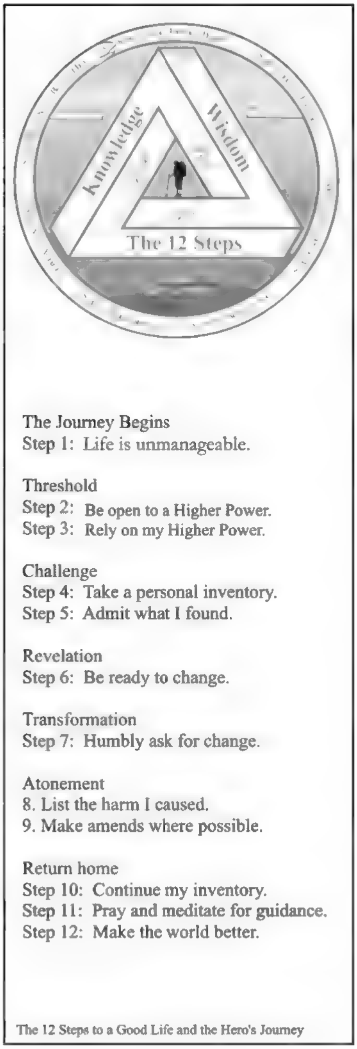
Bookmarks



12 Steps
To A Good Life

The Hero's Journey
Through
Knowledge and Wisdom

Photo by Simon Matzinger from Pexels



The Journey Begins
Step 1: Life is unmanageable.

Threshold
Step 2: Be open to a Higher Power.
Step 3: Rely on my Higher Power.

Challenge
Step 4: Take a personal inventory.
Step 5: Admit what I found.

Revelation
Step 6: Be ready to change.

Transformation
Step 7: Humbly ask for change.

Atonement
8. List the harm I caused.
9. Make amends where possible.

Return home
Step 10: Continue my inventory.
Step 11: Pray and meditate for guidance.
Step 12: Make the world better.

The 12 Steps to a Good Life and the Hero's Journey

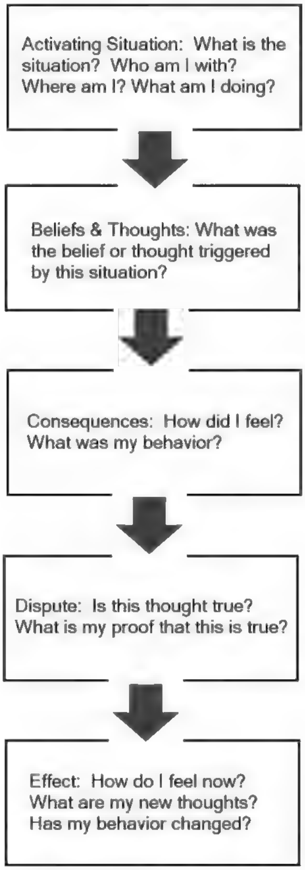
All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

- The Buddha

Buddha clipart public domain

The ABCDE Process



Activating Situation: What is the situation? Who am I with? Where am I? What am I doing?

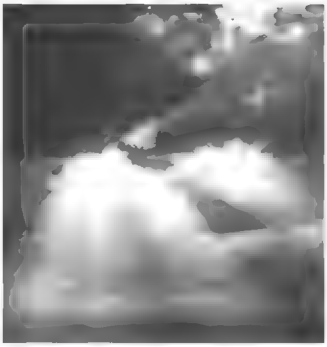
Beliefs & Thoughts: What was the belief or thought triggered by this situation?

Consequences: How did I feel? What was my behavior?

Dispute: Is this thought true? What is my proof that this is true?

Effect: How do I feel now? What are my new thoughts? Has my behavior changed?

See Mind, Thinking for Life



RaDaR

Reflect: The first step is to pause and notice what is happening within you. Reflection means asking, "What am I feeling right now?" and "What story am I telling myself about this moment or this person?"

Describe: Once you are aware of what is going on inside, put it into words. You can describe it silently to yourself, write it down, or share it aloud with someone you trust.

Respond: After you reflect and describe, you can choose your response rather than be driven by old habits. You might set a boundary, express empathy, ask for what you need, or simply let go.

Photo by Adam Kontor from Pexels (Modified)

4-7-8 Breathing

Developed by Dr. Andrew Weil and based on ancient yogic practice:

1. Sit or lie comfortably with your back straight. Empty your lungs.

2. Inhale through your nose for a count of four.

3. Hold your breath for a count of seven.

4. Exhale through your mouth for a count of eight.

Try to practice at least twice a day, especially when you feel stressed. Begin with four repetitions and you can work your way up to eight.

Experiment with changing the timing on your breath for best results.

Illustration: Vitruvian Man

Prayers

Serenity Prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Prayer of St. Francis: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring love. Where there is offence, let me bring pardon. Where there is discord, let me bring union. Where there is error, let me bring truth. Where there is doubt, let me bring faith. Where there is despair, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness, let me bring your light. Where there is sadness, let me bring joy. O Master, let me not seek as much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that one receives, it is in self-forgetting that one finds, it is in pardoning that one is pardoned, it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life. Amen.

Illustration: clipart.co

Simple Ethics

1. Am I trying to satisfy my needs: Physical, Safety, Belonging and Love, Esteem, Self-Fulfillment?
2. Am I motivated by ego: Self-esteem, pride, ambition, security, personal relations, sex relations, control, finances?
3. Does it break any laws or rules?
4. Would there be any negative consequences if I were caught or discovered?
5. Would anyone find it unfair, hurtful, embarrassing, or unpleasant?
6. Would I keep it secret from my partner, family, or friends (other than normal matters of privacy)?
7. Is it something I wouldn't like someone to do to me?
8. Would I feel guilty or bad about myself afterward?
9. Does it do the greatest good for everyone concerned?
10. Am I obligated to do or not do some specific action?
11. Would a virtuous person do it?
12. Does it make the world better?
13. What is my payoff?
14. What is the next right thing?

Scale:free.clipartof.com

Forgiveness

Forgiveness does not ask "what if...? or "why?". It does not rationalize or compare the depth of wounds. There are no degrees of forgiveness. It does not negotiate or expire.

Forgive always. Forgive everything. Forgive completely, continuously, and unconditionally. Forgive radically, intensely, and without qualification. Forgive God. Forgive the universe. Forgive malicious fate and misfortune. Forgive your parents, family, and teachers. Forgive everyone who ever harmed, neglected, or hurt you. Forgive society. Forgive society's leaders. Forgive those who are cruel, ignorant, foolish, and stupid. Forgive thoughtless and rude people. Forgive traitors and bullies. Forgive beauty. Forgive ugliness. Forgive achievement and sloth. Forgive gossips and liars. Forgive those you hate and envy. Forgive the prideful, the arrogant, and the narcissistic. Forgive the rich for being rich, and the poor for being poor. Forgive evil. Forgive the unforgiveable. Forgive everyone for everything, including yourself.

If you cannot or will not do this, you will never be truly free.

Acceptance

"And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation -- some fact of my life -- unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake."

Accept-
...the universe: majestic, terrifying, full of grandeur and vast emptiness.
...ugliness: war, poverty, famine, disease, bitterness, fear, and anger.
...beauty: clouds, rainbows, oceans, mountains, forests, and sunsets.
...people: viscious and cruel,
loving and compassionate,
family, friends, and enemies.
...you: thoughts, feelings, and sensations, hopes and dreams, pain and disappointments, health, illness, guilt, joy, love lost, opportunities missed, death.

Acceptance is Serenity's anchor. There is no illusion and no disillusionment. No resistance. No fear. In acceptance, pain carries no suffering; grief, no bitterness; sadness, no despair.

Quote from Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Ed., p 417

Daily Routine Start

Start your day with quiet time, daily readings, prayer, and your choice of meditation. Add physical movement to fit your lifestyle.

Step 1: Life is unmanageble.
God, Creative Intelligence,
Universal Mind, Spirit of Nature
or Spirit of the Universe,
I know and accept that life is
unmanageable, and I need your
help today. Amen.

Step 2: Be open to a Higher Power.
I am open to your presence today.
I am grateful for...
I am in awe of...
I look forward to...

Step 3: Rely on my Higher Power.
Help me rely on you completely.
My First 3 Things are...
and my tasks for today are...

Live Your Day:
1. Use RaDaR
2. Use prioritized To Do Lists and Reminders Lists to work on your First 3 Things and daily tasks.
3. Keep a bullet list of events, thoughts, and feelings.
4. Apply Knowledge and Wisdom to live in the best way possible.
Do the next right thing.
Make good habits, release bad habits.
5. Inner focus anytime in your day.
6. Review your implementation intentions.

Daily Routine End

End your day with quiet time, daily readings, prayer, and meditation

Step 10: Continue my inventory. "Help me review this day honestly and without fear, grateful for my successes and committed to fixing my mistakes."

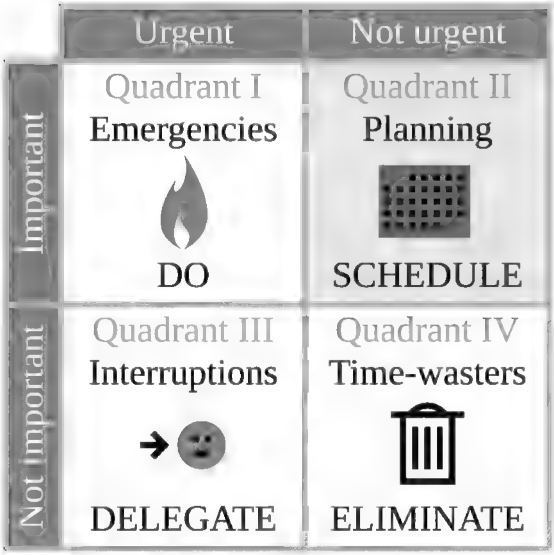
Was I fearful, obsessed, resentful, selfish, angry, dishonest, secretive?
Did I cause any harm?
Do I owe any amends?
What did I do well?
What could I do better?
What is good about today?

Step 11: Pray and meditate for guidance. "I humbly ask for your help and guidance, especially about..."

Step 12: Make the world better.
"Today I made the world better by:..."

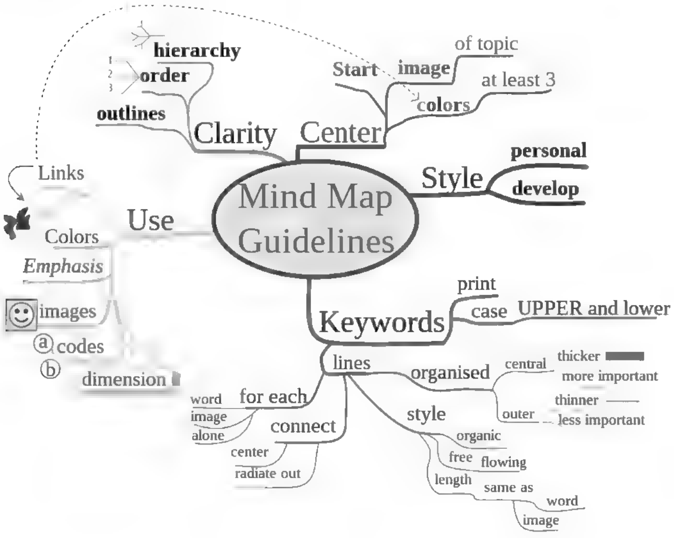
Self-Rated Wellness for Today:
Job / Education / Retirement
Finances / Legal Issues
Weight / Health / Exercise / Sleep
Friend Relationships
Family Relationships
Romantic Relationships
Sex Life / Emotional Life
Communication
Spirituality
Free Time / Hobbies
Drinking / Drug Use

Eisenhower Matrix[2]



	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Quadrant I Emergencies DO	Quadrant II Planning SCHEDULE
Not important	Quadrant III Interruptions DELEGATE	Quadrant IV Time-wasters ELIMINATE

Mind Mapping Example[3]

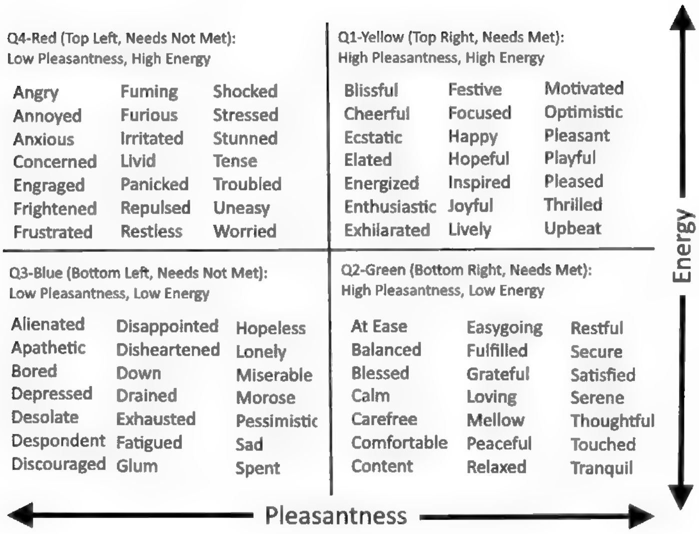

Mind Map Guidelines
Center
Start
image
of topic
at least 3
colors
Clarity
hierarchy
order
outlines
Style
personal
develop
Use
Links
Colors
Emphasis
images
codes
dimension
Keywords
print
case
UPPER and lower
lines
for each
word
image
alone
connect
center
radiate out
organised
central
thicker
more important
outer
thinner
less important
style
organic
free
flowing
length
same as
word
image

---

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_management#/media/File:Eisenhower_matrix.svg

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map#/media/File:MindMapGuidlines.svg

Mood Meter Example[4]



Q4-Red (Top Left, Needs Not Met):
Low Pleasantness, High Energy

Angry
Annoyed
Anxious
Concerned
Engraged
Frightened
Frustrated
Fuming
Furious
Irritated
Livid
Panicked
Repulsed
Restless
Shocked
Stressed
Stunned
Tense
Troubled
Uneasy
Worried

Q1-Yellow (Top Right, Needs Met):
High Pleasantness, High Energy

Blissful
Cheerful
Ecstatic
Elated
Energized
Enthusiastic
Exhilarated
Festive
Focused
Happy
Hopeful
Inspired
Joyful
Lively
Motivated
Optimistic
Pleasant
Playful
Pleased
Thrilled
Upbeat

Q3-Blue (Bottom Left, Needs Not Met):
Low Pleasantness, Low Energy

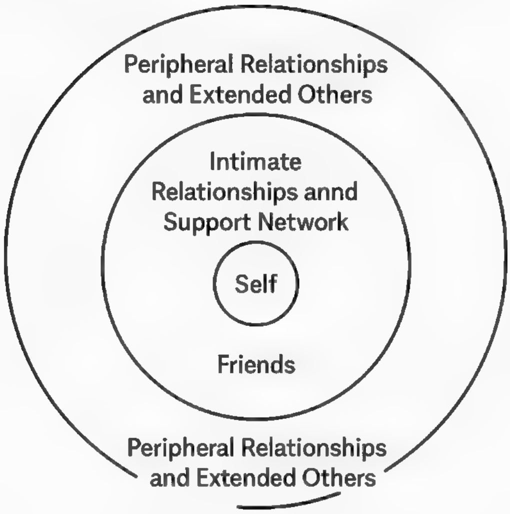
Alienated
Apathetic
Bored
Depressed
Desolate
Despondent
Discouraged
Disappointed
Disheartened
Down
Drained
Exhausted
Fatigued
Glum
Hopeless
Lonely
Miserable
Morose
Pessimistic
Sad
Spent

Q2-Green (Bottom Right, Needs Met):
High Pleasantness, Low Energy

At Ease
Balanced
Blessed
Calm
Carefree
Comfortable
Content
Easygoing
Fulfilled
Grateful
Loving
Mellow
Peaceful
Relaxed
Restful
Secure
Satisfied
Serene
Thoughtful
Touched
Tranquil

Energy
Pleasantness

Circles of Relationships


Peripheral Relationships and Extended Others
Intimate Relationships annd Support Network
Self
Friends
Peripheral Relationships and Extended Others

---

[4] Original Figure, based on Marc Brackett, PhD, "Permission to Feel"

Summary of Part 1: Foundation

Living a good life means pursuing peace, meaning, and fulfillment, not through magic or wishful thinking, but through grounded awareness and responsible choices. It means becoming honest about your desires, your habits, and the beliefs that shape your experience. Suffering often arises from misunderstanding reality, clinging to illusions, or resisting what is. Many people attempt to control life through denial or blame, but real change begins when you accept life on its terms. You cannot control everything that happens, but you can learn how to respond with clarity and courage. A good life is not a perfect life, it is a life honestly lived.

The foundation is built on four simple ideas:

1. Human beings are driven by needs, from basic survival (food, water, shelter) to emotional belonging and spiritual transcendence. These needs shape our motivations and behaviors.

2. Our needs are filtered through unconscious beliefs, attitudes, and past experiences. These filters distort how we perceive ourselves, others, and the world, often without our awareness.

3. New insight requires stepping outside our current worldview. We must leave the confines of familiar thought patterns to grow. The "box" we live in cannot hold the solutions we need; transformation begins when we look beyond it.

4. There is a truth that transcends logic and language, something greater than us that can only be experienced, not taught or proven. This truth becomes visible through personal openness, humility, and a willingness to change.

We interact with reality in three ways:

1. We crash into it through poor decisions, ignoring red flags, repeating harmful habits, or pursuing unrealistic expectations.

2. Reality crashes into us through events outside our control, loss, illness, aging, or sudden change. These moments shake our foundations and force reassessment.

3. We cooperate with reality, learning to ride its waves like a surfer, neither resisting nor retreating, but skillfully engaging with what is.

Through the 12 Steps, the Hero's Journey, and the teachings in Knowledge and Wisdom, you learn how to evaluate your thoughts, face uncomfortable truths, and develop practical skills to live well. These are not lofty theories; they are grounded practices for real people in the real world. With persistence, honesty, and a little faith, you can find peace, purpose, and meaning.

Summary of The Perennial Struggle

Many people sense an underlying dissatisfaction that persists regardless of achievements, relationships, or life stages. This unease is not tied to any one event but reflects a deeper truth: we are not broken, but human. This experience, called the Perennial Struggle, is the core tension between who we are and who we long to become, between our fears and desires, hopes and regrets.

All humans face similar struggles:

Love and Intimacy: You crave deep connection but fear vulnerability. Early experiences can make it hard to trust, creating cycles of closeness and withdrawal.

Identity and Authenticity: Becoming yourself is a lifelong process. You may struggle with feeling fake, lost, or disconnected from a sense of who you are.

Control and Power: A desire for control often stems from past chaos. Perfectionism and distrust feel safe, but they prevent peace, growth, and trust.

Fear and Insecurity: Fear of failure, and success, inhibit growth. The inner critic fuels doubt, keeping you stuck in avoidance and dependence on reassurance.

Meaning and Purpose: Know your purpose. Without it, you risk drifting into dissatisfaction, chasing goals that never fulfill and fearing wasted time.

Fear of Death and Dissolution: Mortality casts a shadow over life's choices. You may overwork, chase legacy, or act recklessly to avoid facing your impermanence.

Belonging and Alienation: You want community yet fear losing your identity. You seek connection while resisting conformity, leading to isolation.

Freedom and Responsibility: Autonomy is liberating but heavy with responsibility. Fear of making the wrong choices can result in indecision or avoidance of commitment.

Justice and Forgiveness: The desire for fairness clashes with the need to forgive. Holding onto grievances leads to bitterness; letting go opens the door to peace.

Chaos and Order: Too much structure stifles, too little destabilizes. Balancing freedom and routine is essential for adaptability and inner calm.

While you cannot escape the Perennial Struggle, you can live and thrive within it. The goal is not perfection or ease, but participation, working with life instead of against it. As you begin to accept and understand your inner tension, you transform it. The struggle becomes your teacher. With time and persistence, the path leads to healing, meaning, and wholeness. This is not a flaw in the human condition; it is the heart of the human journey.

The 12 Steps, the Hero's Journey, Knowledge, and Wisdom, all provide powerful tools to help you live your best life, and make the world a better place.

Summary of a Good Life

Everyone desires to live a good life, one filled with peace, meaning, connection, and joy. But many fail to question what a "good life" actually means to them.

Instead, they chase vague ideals, shaped by social expectations and false assumptions, only to feel discontent when those ideals fall short. We tend to believe that more money, a better partner, or luck will deliver happiness, but these external solutions rarely satisfy our deeper needs.

A good life is not built on fantasy or fleeting pleasure. It is grounded in the honest evaluation of your beliefs, habits, and goals. You must learn to distinguish between what you truly need and what you have been conditioned to want.

Maslow's hierarchy offers a clear structure: meet basic needs first, safety, food, love, belonging, and then pursue growth through learning, achievement, and purpose. Yet even this path is easily obscured by confusion about money, sex, and success.

The philosopher Aristotle called the highest good eudaimonia, a lifelong sense of well-being based on rational and virtuous living. He defined it as:

1. Something desirable in itself.
2. Not for the sake of something else.
3. The aim for which all other goods are pursued.

Aristotle added that good fortune matters too. But the harder you work to live well, the more likely that fortune becomes. Still, even bad luck cannot strip you of dignity and meaning unless you let it.

Modern culture offers mixed messages. You are told to chase wealth and status, but also to seek mindfulness and simplicity. These contradictions can lead to confusion and dissatisfaction. Often, your goals are shaped by others, family, media, society, rather than your own values. Without careful examination, you may spend your life pursuing distractions that feel urgent but are not fulfilling.

Happiness, while often desired, is not a goal in itself. It is a by-product of living well, acting with reason, virtue, and clarity. As Aristotle taught, true well-being is found in a lifetime of ethical, thoughtful living. Fortune plays a role, but dignity and meaning are always within reach through your own actions.

You must reject the ready-made script and build your own values-based path. Reflect deeply on what truly matters to you, not what you were told to want. By examining your assumptions and learning practical tools for clear thinking, emotional regulation, and ethical action, you can shape a life that is not only good, but your own.

Summary of Step 1: Life is Unmanageable

Step 1 focuses on recognizing the unmanageability of life. It emphasizes the need to confront reality, acknowledging that unhappiness stems from unrealistic expectations and a misunderstanding of life's complexities.

The Nature of Control: Life's unpredictability is akin to a fragile bubble that limits our perception. People often live in a trance, avoiding real experiences and emotions due to their desire for control.

Acknowledging Unmanageability: Accepting life as unmanageable leads to personal transformation. This acceptance encourages individuals to relinquish the illusion of control and embrace life's inherent unpredictability.

Positive Aspects of Unmanageability
Unexpected Opportunities: New experiences that foster growth.
Spontaneous Joy: Happiness that arises without planning.
Personal Growth: Facing adversity can lead to inner strength.
Creative Inspiration: Unpredictability can spark new ideas.

Negative Aspects of Unmanageability
Unexpected Loss: Grief from losing loved ones.
Financial and Health Challenges: Issues that disrupt stability and routine.
Natural and Relationship Struggles: Chaos that complicates everything.

Benefits of Accepting Unmanageability
Truth Acknowledgment: Aligning with reality instead of resisting it.
Humility: Understanding one's limits brings openness to learning.
Adaptability: Acceptance encourages resilience and flexibility.
Mindfulness: Focused awareness of the present increases appreciation for life.

Spiritual Growth Through Unmanageability: Embracing unmanageability allows for deeper wisdom and spiritual growth. Surrendering control builds trust, allowing individuals to see meaning and purpose amidst chaos.

Step 1 is an invitation to embrace unmanageability as a pathway to spiritual enrichment. By letting go of the need for control, individuals can develop qualities like humility, faith, and resilience. This leads to personal growth and a meaningful, connected life.

Step 1 Prayer: A prayer for guidance and acceptance of life's unmanageable aspects is included, seeking support from a higher power.

Reflections and Work: Reflect on personal experiences with unmanageability, both positive and negative. Recognize the growth and lessons learned from accepting life's unpredictable nature.

Summary of Step 2: Be Open to a Higher Power

Step 2 invites you to explore a relationship with something greater than yourself, your Higher Power, through openness, reflection, and humility. It emphasizes personal, flexible spirituality rather than religious dogma, allowing each person to define their own path to meaning.

Spiritual Openness: Challenge rigid skepticism and narrow thinking. Pascal's Wager and modern scientific humility encourage belief in a greater reality, not as blind faith, but as a wise and pragmatic choice. Release preconceived ideas of "God" and instead create space for a personal understanding of the divine. Spirituality is a personal experience.

Rejecting Dogma: Religious institutions may be flawed human creations. Focus is on the personal experience of spirituality, not external doctrine. The Zen idea of *mu* shows how limited language and binary logic obstructs deeper truths. Abandon arguments and paradoxes in favor of authentic experience.

Your Higher Power:
Is something other than your conscious self.
Is greater or smarter or more powerful.
Cares about you.
Is large enough to trust for the next step.

Key Virtues: Acceptance means surrendering your need for certainty and embracing mystery and the limits of your understanding. Gratitude reorients your attention toward the good already present in your life and opens you to deeper awareness. Awe reminds you that you are part of something vast, beautiful, and humbling. It shifts your perspective and nourishes your spirit.

Cautions and Compassion: Others may use different terminology for God. Respect differing beliefs and reject judgment or superiority over language. Your spiritual path is your own.

Step 2 is about willingness: Willingness to consider a greater power, to accept what you do not know, and to trust that something loving and wise can guide you forward.

Step 2 Prayer: God, I am standing at the turning point right now. Give me your protection and care as I abandon myself to you and give up my old ways and my old ideas just for today. Amen.
Step 2 Work: Focus on finding personal acceptance, expressing gratitude, recalling experiences of awe, and identifying your Higher Power.

Summary of Step 3: Rely on Your Higher Power

Step 3 asks you to stop relying solely on your own will and begin trusting in something greater. It is the point where a Higher Power becomes *your* Higher Power, something you can depend on for clarity, strength, and guidance. It is giving up responsibility and releasing the illusion of total control and aligning yourself with a deeper, wiser force.

You do not need to have every question answered or every doubt erased. You only need to be willing to try something different. Willing to admit that your best efforts, on their own, have not always led you to peace or purpose. Let go of the need to force outcomes and instead begin to participate in life as it unfolds, guided by a power that wants your highest good.

Relying on your Higher Power will not grant you every wish. It will not make life painless or perfect. But it will help you see clearly, act wisely, and stay grounded. It will help you stop fighting everything and start flowing with life's current instead of thrashing against it. Your Higher Power will not do the work *for* you, it works *through* you, changing how you respond to life's challenges and possibilities.

Taking Step 3 does not mean passivity. You still act. You still choose. But your choices come from a place of faith and alignment rather than fear and control. You learn to ask for help, not from desperation, but from trust. You begin to listen more deeply to that quiet inner voice that knows what is right.

Step 3 is not adopting anyone else's concept of God. You find your Higher Power in a way that speaks to you. It might be a sense of universal intelligence, a future version of yourself, nature, love, collective wisdom, or something sacred that you cannot name.

Step 3 gives you permission to enter your life more fully. You take this step not just with your mind, but with your heart. You pray, you listen, and you try. Step 3 is the turning point. It is when you stop fighting the universe and begin aligning with it. You give yourself over, not in defeat, but in trust. And in that surrender, you find strength.

Step 3 Prayer: God, I offer myself to you, to shape and guide me as you see fit. Free me from the chains of my ego so I can more fully know and follow your will. Help me move through my struggles with ease, that others may see your presence in me.

Step 3 Work: Write a brief personal biography, reflecting on key Examine your present circumstances without comparison to others. Do you see signs that the universe is friendly toward you, such as having your basic needs met or moments of unexpected grace? Reflect on what it means to give up control and rely on your Higher Power. Can you begin to let go of anxiety and the need to manage everything yourself? If your Higher Power could help you become a better version of yourself, what might change in your life?

Summary of Step 4: Take an Inventory

Step 4 calls for you to take an honest, thorough, and fearless inventory of yourself. It involves clarity, rather than guilt and blame. You examine your behaviors, thoughts, patterns, fears, and motivations, not to punish yourself, but to understand yourself. By exploring how your needs have shaped your actions, you uncover both your strengths and your wounds.

Step 4 involves deep self-examination, often uncomfortable, but necessary. You look at where you were hurt, where you hurt others, and how your beliefs, habits, and choices have shaped your life. You face your anger, fear, guilt, and shame with courage. You seek objectivity, this is an audit, not an indictment. With honesty and patience, you identify what holds you back and what you can build on.

Do not to go it alone. Having a trusted mentor or counselor provides support and clarity when emotions get overwhelming. This step is about spiritual and emotional housecleaning, removing what no longer serves you, so healing can begin. It takes bravery, but the reward is freedom. When done with sincerity and humility, Step 4 becomes a turning point. You begin to know yourself in a deeper way, preparing you for the steps that follow.

Be as thorough as possible with Step 4 and take the time you need. There is no deadline, though procrastination may signal fear. It is normal to recall additional insights after you think you are done; just include what you can with honesty and care. Keep your inventory private, sharing only with your chosen sponsor, counselor, or trusted guide. When you have done your best, prayed about it, and your mentor agrees, your inventory is complete.

Step 4 Prayer: God, help me to honestly take stock. Help me to search out the flaws in my make-up which caused my failure. Help me to resolutely look for my own mistakes and to understand where I had been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened. Please help me to be searching and fearless in my endeavor to write my inventory. Amen.

Step 4 Work: Find a trusted mentor, counselor, or guide before beginning your inventory, especially for your first time through. Then complete a thorough and honest self-inventory. Be methodical and meticulous, taking breaks when needed. Focus on identifying patterns, motivations, and emotional triggers, not just listing events. Acknowledge both your faults and your strengths. If distress arises, stop and seek support. Take pride in your willingness to grow, and know that completing this step is a profound act of courage and commitment to living a good life.

Summary for Step 5: Admit What I Found

Step 5 is the act of admitting your inventory to yourself, your Higher Power, and another person. This step breaks the isolation of shame, fear, and guilt, transforming secrets into truth. It deepens your humility and invites connection, internally, spiritually, and relationally.

By speaking aloud what you uncovered in Step 4, you move from knowing your flaws to taking responsibility for them. You confront self-deception and open the door to freedom, healing, and integrity. Though difficult, sharing your full truth with a compassionate, trustworthy person brings clarity and relief that cannot be found alone.

There is no shortcut for Step 5. Honest connection with another person activates deep psychological changes and makes your spiritual progress real. The essence of Step 5 is telling the secrets that are holding you back.

Select someone you trust, someone compassionate, mature, and capable of listening without judgment. Ideally, they understand what you are trying to do, perhaps a sponsor, counselor, spiritual advisor, or someone familiar with the Steps. Avoid close friends, family members, or anyone with a personal stake in your story. The right person will help you to be honest and thorough.

If needed, split the Step. You may choose to divide your Step 5 with more than one person, for example, speaking to a therapist about trauma issues, an attorney about legal issues, and a sponsor about your personal or spiritual growth. This is acceptable as long as you are completely honest in both settings and leave nothing out due to fear or shame. The goal is full disclosure in a safe environment, not one-size-fits-all perfection.

Step 5 Prayer: God, help me admit to myself, to you, and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. Help me find the person who will keep my trust and show me compassion and understanding. Remove my pride and fear of this Step and show me how completing it will make me a better person so I can live a good life. Help me be honest and thorough so I can feel closer to you and make the world better. Amen.

Step 5 Work: Review your Step 4 inventory with complete honesty. Then, find a trustworthy person, someone who is compassionate and nonjudgmental, and schedule time to share what you found. Begin with a prayer, then admit the exact nature of your wrongs. Do not hold anything back. Listen openly to feedback and answer questions sincerely.

Summary for Step 6: Be Ready to Change

After uncovering your character defects in Steps 4 and 5, Step 6 invites you to become willing to let them go. These flaws, often rooted in early coping mechanisms, once served to protect you, but now they hold you back. Step 6 asks a simple but profound question: are you truly ready to change?

Step 6 marks the end of the first half of the Steps. It is the beginning of the bridge you cross to get to the other side of your life. While Step 6 is often minimized or hurried, it is as important as any other Step. Do not take it lightly.

Character defects are difficult to release because they are familiar and tied to your sense of self. Letting go of anger, control, fear, or pride can feel like exposing the wounds they were covering. But change begins not with perfection, but with willingness. Step 6 is the bridge between your old self and your new one—a threshold moment. You begin to see that your flaws are not your identity. You are not "bad." You are human, and you can heal.

Your character defects often begin as responses to pain, times when you felt scared, rejected, or hurt. Over time, these responses are shaped by a distorted worldview picked up from your environment. You learn to meet your basic needs in unhealthy ways. Character defects are like passengers on a lost bus all arguing about which way to go. These defects once served a purpose, helping you survive, but now they do more harm than good. What began as protection becomes a burden, embedded in you like second nature.

To take Step 6, examine your flaws honestly and ask whether you are ready to release each one. Even if your answer is "not yet," your willingness to try marks the beginning of growth. This is a spiritual moment, an inward death and rebirth. You are not asked to fix yourself, only to be ready for change.

Step 6 Prayer: Dear God, please help me to be willing to let go of any flaw or character defect I may still be clinging to. Grant me the courage and humility to face my shortcomings, and trust in your wisdom and love.

Step 6 Work: Step 6 work begins by reviewing your list of character defects from Step 4. For each one, describe how it affects your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Reflect on the hidden payoff of holding onto the defect and the harm it causes you and others. Identify whether this flaw is part of a recurring cycle. Then, imagine what your life could be like without it. Step 6 is not removing your defects by force, but preparing your heart and mind to let them go.

Summary of Step 7: Humbly Ask for Change

Step 7 is the turning point where true spiritual transformation begins. It is where you ask your Higher Power to remove the flaws and character defects revealed in your inventory. These defects once served as survival strategies, but they now hold you back. Change begins with humility, the willingness to see your place in the universe without pride or entitlement. You do not demand change; you ask for it, sincerely, humbly, and without ego.

Humility opens the door. Whether your transformation is sudden or gradual, Step 7 requires a deep willingness to let go of the patterns that no longer serve you. You may kneel in prayer, ask for healing, and be specific in your requests, seeking patience for anger, generosity for greed, or forgiveness for resentment.

Your role is not to force change but to allow it, trusting that your Higher Power will remove what you are ready to release. You do not need to be perfect, only honest, willing, and open.

Step 7 Prayer: My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.

Step 7 Work

Review your list of defects from Step 4 and note how they impact your life.

In prayer or meditation, express gratitude and humbly ask your Higher Power to help you change.

Be specific in naming what you want to release or transform.

Repeat this process as needed, with patience and faith that change will come in the right way and time.

Summary of Step 8: List the Harm I Caused

Step 8 continues your healing by asking you to confront the harm you caused, to others and to yourself, and prepare to make it right. This becomes a process of truth, courage, and humility.

You begin by revisiting your Step 4 inventory and the insights gained in Step 5. From that work, you generate a list of the people you have harmed through action, inaction, neglect, or indifference. Do not censor or edit this list; just be honest. Harm includes more than obvious wrongs. It also includes opportunities missed to show care, to help, or to tell the truth. Even neglecting yourself, physically, emotionally, or spiritually, belongs on the list.

Step 8 focuses on your own behavior, not on how others treated you. You cannot control what others have done, only your own part. Looking ahead to Step 9 can make this Step harder. Stay present. Step 8 is not making amends yet, it is just making a list.

Forgiveness begins here, not just of others, but of yourself. Recognize the pain you caused yourself, and add your own name to the list. This makes room for compassion and opens the door to real change.

Step 8 Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask Your help in making my list of all those I have harmed. I will take responsibility for my actions, and begin to clear my past mistakes. Grant me the willingness to begin my restitution. Amen.

Step 8 Work

Reflect and Record: Set aside quiet time to think about past relationships and behavior. Write down the harm you caused and the role you played.

Create a Timeline: Track major life events, noting when harm occurred. This helps reveal patterns in your behavior.

Empathize: Write from the perspective of the people you hurt. How did your actions affect them?

Clarify Your Values: Identify the principles that now guide your life. Align your future behavior with those values to prevent repeating past harm.

Summary Step 9: Make Amends Where Possible

Step 9 is where you take action to repair the damage caused by your past behavior. You reach out to the people you have harmed—when possible and appropriate—and do your best to set things right. This is not just about saying sorry; it is about demonstrating a real change in who you are. It is one of the most difficult but rewarding Steps you will take.

You begin with the list from Step 8 and make direct amends where possible. You must act with humility, sincerity, and a willingness to listen. Each situation is unique. Sometimes, you will be welcomed with kindness. Other times, you may face anger or rejection. You must be willing to accept both. In situations where direct amends are not appropriate, such as if they would cause more harm, you choose indirect or alternative forms of restitution. You are not looking for praise or, necessarily, forgiveness. You are taking responsibility and trying to repair the harm you caused.

Making amends changes you. It helps restore damaged relationships, heal inner wounds, and sets you free from guilt and regret. But also remember, the focus of Step 9 is the other person. It is a process that requires discernment. You must avoid doing more harm, especially in sensitive situations involving trauma, emotional pain, and privacy. Guidance from mentors and prayer can help you determine the right course of action.

You may not complete all your amends quickly. Some will take time. That is okay. What matters is your willingness and intention to make things right. As long as you begin, and commit to the process, you are free to continue the Steps while finishing your amends over time. Step 9 is not the end, it is the beginning of restoration, growth, and a life of deeper peace.

Step 9 Prayer: I pray for the right attitude as I work on Step 9, being ever mindful not to cause harm to others in the process. I seek Your guidance in approaching each situation with honesty and sincerity. I will do my best to live well, help others, and make the world better.

Step 9 Work

Begin with your Step 8 list. For each situation, decide whether direct, indirect, or alternative amends are appropriate. For face-to-face amends, prepare carefully, speak with sincerity, and be willing to listen.

When direct amends are not possible, consider alternatives: handwritten or unsent letters, quiet acts of service, sincere donations, or simply living a better life. Some amends will take time. Be patient, stay honest, and remain willing.

Keep moving forward even as the process unfolds.

Summary of Step 10: Continue My Inventory

Step 10 is the first of the maintenance Steps and introduces the practice of daily self-reflection. By continuing your inventory each day, you build a life rooted in awareness, responsibility, and spiritual growth. The core of this Step is to examine your actions, thoughts, and emotions honestly and regularly. Using a simple daily review, you learn from your missteps, reinforce your values, and make immediate course corrections when needed. This process strengthens your integrity and deepens your recovery.

A structured approach like RaDaR (Reflect, Describe, Respond), can enhance your Step 10 work. RaDaR allows you to slow down, examine your inner state, and respond intentionally instead of reacting impulsively. Whether used in quiet journaling or real-time moments of stress, it aligns your behavior with your spiritual principles. Step 10 helps you grow in humility and mindfulness, keeping your life oriented toward healing and wholeness.

The Six Step 10 Questions:
Have I been fearful, obsessive, resentful, selfish, angry, or dishonest?
Did I cause any harm?
Do I owe any amends?
What did I do well?
What could I have done better?
What is good about today?

Step 10 Prayer: Lord, grant me the strength and wisdom to grow in understanding and honesty. Help me to vigilantly watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear within myself. Grant me the humility to make amends where I caused harm. Guide me in living according to your will, removing arrogance and fear from my heart. Amen.

Step 10 Work

Each evening, take time to journal your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Look for patterns of fear, dishonesty, resentment, or selfishness. Use RaDaR or mindfulness practices to examine your internal state without judgment. Reflect on whether your actions aligned with your values, and whether you caused harm or owe amends. This daily habit deepens your self-awareness and keeps your spiritual progress on track.

Speak regularly with a sponsor or mentor about what you discover. Share your struggles, note successes, and get perspective. Practice forgiveness, toward others and yourself, as a conscious act of healing. Let go of resentments and learn from your mistakes. Step 10 is not always comfortable, but it is vital. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Step 11: Pray and Meditate for Guidance

Step 11 invites you to establish daily conscious contact with your Higher Power through prayer and meditation. Just as your body needs food and rest, your spirit thrives on connection and Inner Focus. This practice gives you clarity, helps you align your actions with your values, and makes you more responsive to the needs of others. You are not praying to get things but to be guided toward what is right. Even when results are subtle, regular spiritual practice leads to peace, insight, and a deeper sense of belonging.

This Step is about honesty, openness, and willingness. Make prayer and meditation a part of your daily rhythm: ask for guidance in the morning, pause during the day to listen inwardly, and close the day in reflection. Be realistic, patient, and kind to yourself. Spiritual growth is not perfection; it is a lifelong path of becoming more honest, aware, and loving in your relationship with yourself, others, and your Higher Power.

Step 11 Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace, that where there is hatred, I may bring love, that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness, that where there is discord, I may bring harmony, that where there is error, I may bring truth, that where there is doubt, I may bring faith, that where there is despair, I may bring hope, that where there are shadows, I may bring light, that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted, to understand, than to be understood, to love, than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life. Amen.

Step 11 Work

Start your day with quiet reflection and gratitude.
Set a time for daily meditation, focus on breath, a thought, or a passage.
Pause during the day for mindful breathing or silent prayer.
Keep a journal of prayers, meditations, and insights.
Try walking meditation in nature to stay grounded and present.
Reflect on blessings and thank your Higher Power.
Practice compassion to yourself and others.
Read inspirational or spiritual texts and reflect deeply on their message.

Summary of Step 12: Make the World Better

Step 12 calls you to carry the spiritual awakening of the previous Steps into the world. It is the outward expression of inner transformation—a shift from personal healing to compassionate action. You begin by practicing kindness in your daily life: listening deeply, offering help without being asked, forgiving freely, and sharing your time or skills without seeking praise. These small acts create ripples of goodwill. You cannot fix the world, but you can make your corner of it better.

This is not abstract or performative. Step 12 means doing real, meaningful good, face-to-face, hands-on, and from the heart. Whether that is quietly helping a neighbor, volunteering, or supporting someone else through the Steps, your actions reflect your growth. You align yourself with a Higher Power not by words alone, but by living love, truth, and service. That is how you make the world better, starting now, starting small, starting wherever you are. Think, more than popular global causes, real change on a personal, local level. Your family, your neighborhood, your city…

Step 12 Prayer: God, guide me through the Steps from self-reflection and growth to contributing to a better world. Help me spread kindness and understanding to everyone I meet. May my actions reflect your divine love and compassion, transforming myself and others. Amen.

Step 12 Work Summary

Do not overthink it. Just begin. Practice listening without interrupting, helping without reward, and encouraging without judgment. Take care of others through service, empathy, and practical support. Do something meaningful that costs you time, energy, or vulnerability. Smile at strangers, write kind notes, clean your neighborhood, or share your experience with someone in recovery. Every act of love adds to a better world, and changes you in the process. Make the world better.

Summary of Knowledge 3.1 Being

Being begins with the pursuit of self-knowledge, not as a lightning bolt, but as a process of peeling back layers over time. Knowing yourself is essential to living a meaningful life, yet few dare to do it fully. The section outlines ten truths about being: you are responsible for your life; the past is gone and the future is unknowable; the only time to act is now; death is inevitable; and you are not your thoughts or feelings but the awareness that experiences them. Life is made of traded moments, and every moment is your choice.

Your worldview is the unseen framework behind all your thoughts and actions. Most of it was absorbed unconsciously from culture, media, and upbringing. Yet it shapes every decision and belief you hold. Examining your worldview is key to understanding yourself and aligning your life with reality.

What do you believe is the fundamental reality behind all existence?
Is the universe friendly, hostile, ordered, chaotic something else?
How do you define yourself as a being, and why do you exist?
What happens when you die?
Where does self-awareness come from, and what is the nature of your "I"?
How do you know right from wrong?
What is the story of humanity: progress, decline, or cyclic?
What responsibilities, duties, or rituals are required by your worldview?

Self-Assessment Exercises

Satisfaction with Life Scale: A short 5-question survey to check how satisfied you are with your life overall. Best used regularly.

Basic Needs Inventory: A tool to assess whether your basic physical, emotional, and mental needs are being met.

Self-Rated Wellness Scale: A simple way to rate your current wellness.

IPIP: Measures five personality traits.

Values Clarification: Identify what matters most to you.

Time Tracking: Reveals how you actually spend your time.

Life Overview: A big-picture tool to reflect on your direction in life.

Powerlessness and Unmanageable Items: A way to identify what is in your control and what is not, helping you focus on what you can change.

Applied Mindfulness Process Scale: Measures your mindfulness in daily life.

Summary of Knowledge 3.2 Doing

Productivity alone does not lead to a good life unless it connects to meaning, growth, and virtue. Real change does not come from effort or insight alone. It requires shifting how you act and what motivates you.

Trying harder is not the answer. Many well-meaning strategies, like self-knowledge, willpower, or fear of consequences, fail when disconnected from a deeper purpose. Instead of repeating the same patterns, engage differently. You change not by forcing effort, but by aligning action with something greater than yourself.

When your actions are tied to a higher purpose you become more effective, resilient, and fulfilled. You are aligning with your values and energy to create meaningful action. Ask your Higher Power to guide your actions. Let your doing reflect your being.

To make lasting change, you must align your actions with a higher good and focus daily on your top priorities. Insight, willpower, and fear alone are not enough to shift behavior, especially when procrastination is rooted in fear, fatigue, or misaligned values. Busyness is not the same as living well, growth matters more than achievement. Examine whether your goals are truly your own, and remember that much of your behavior is shaped by your unconscious, not just conscious intent. Real change begins with building consistent habits and learning the difference between what you should do, what you want to do, and what you genuinely need.

Five Parts of Doing:

You: Personal habits, values, and strengths.
Time: Your most limited resource; learn to manage it wisely.
Tools: Systems and techniques that enable efficient progress.
Engagement: Applying yourself with commitment and focus.
Living Virtuously: Acting in ways that reflect ethics and inner integrity.

Living Virtuously:
Right Understanding: See reality clearly; practice humility and self-inquiry.
Right Intention: Align goals with your values and conscious purpose.
Right Speech: Speak honestly, kindly, and with awareness.
Right Action: Do the next right thing, especially when it is difficult.
Right Livelihood: Let your work reflect your ethics and avoid harm.
Right Effort: Stay steady in your practice without pushing too hard.
Right Mindfulness: Be aware of your thoughts, emotions, and motivations.
Right Concentration: Focus on what matters; pray and meditate.

Summary of Knowledge 3.3 Body

When you think clearly, eat mindfully, sleep consistently, and move daily, you support the conditions for living a good life. These four anchors connect your intentions with your actions and make it possible to live with integrity, energy, and grace.

Think: Right thinking is foundational to right action. Your mindset determines your quality of life. You must actively shape your thoughts through reflection, honesty, and alignment with a greater good. Avoid passive rumination and self-criticism; instead, use tools like RaDaR to become aware, name your patterns, and choose a better response. Recognize that your unconscious drives much of your behavior, lasting change requires going beyond willpower or self-knowledge. Anchor your actions in purpose and integrity. Return often to your values, goals, and connection to your Higher Power to stay centered and effective.

Eat: Eating well is not about guilt, restriction, or rigid rules. It is about nourishment, awareness, and sustainability. Choose real food that energizes you. Eat with attention to how food makes you feel, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Avoid extremes of indulgence or asceticism. Recognize emotional triggers and automatic habits. Eating is not separate from your spiritual life; how you eat reflects how you care for yourself and how present you are in your body and your choices.

Sleep: Sleep is essential for mental clarity, physical health, and emotional balance. Most people ignore its importance until exhaustion catches up with them. Create habits that support deep rest: a wind-down routine, consistent sleep and wake times, and a screen-free buffer before bed. Respect the signals your body gives you. Without adequate sleep, your ability to reflect, choose wisely, and live purposefully is undermined. Sleep is not optional, it is a pillar of doing well.

Move: Movement is a daily necessity, not a chore or punishment. You do not need a gym or fancy routine, just move your body every day. Walk, stretch, do micro-workouts, climb stairs, dance in your kitchen. Motion clears your mind, strengthens your body, and lifts your spirit. Avoid the trap of perfectionism or all-or-nothing thinking. Movement is honoring your body and keeping yourself alive and engaged with life.

Summary of Knowledge 3.4 Mind

The mind interprets reality and creates meaning, but its guesses and stories can lead to unnecessary suffering. Your thoughts are not facts, they are interpretations shaped by past experiences, biases, and internal narratives. If left unchecked, these thoughts can spiral into anxiety, depression, resentment, and self-deception. The path to freedom begins with monitoring your thinking. Noticing, questioning, and challenging your thoughts helps bring them into closer alignment with reality.

There are three kinds of truth:

Objective truth: reality that exists independently of you.
Subjective truth: your personal interpretation.
Constructed truth: shared cultural beliefs.

Cognitive Distortions:

Catastrophizing: Expecting the worst outcome in every situation.
All-or-Nothing Thinking: Viewing things in extremes.
Mind Reading: Assuming you know what others think, usually negatively.
Fortune Telling: Predicting failure or disaster without evidence.
Labeling: Defining yourself or others by a single negative trait.
Emotional Reasoning: Believing something is true because it feels that way.
Should/Must Thinking: Imposing rigid expectations on yourself or others.
Personalization: Blaming yourself for things outside your control.
Blaming: Holding others responsible for your problems or emotions.
Always Being Right: Refusing to consider you could be wrong.
Overgeneralizing: Making sweeping negative conclusions.
Disqualifying the Positive: Ignoring or dismissing your achievements.
Mental Filtering: Focusing only on the negative details of an experience.
Magical Thinking: Believing thoughts or wishes alone can change reality.

Use the tools provided, including RaDaR:

Reflect on the situation. Pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. Try to recognize any patterns, triggers, or assumptions that may be influencing your current state.

Describe what you are thinking, feeling, and reacting to in clear, honest words. You can speak it aloud or write it down. Avoid judging yourself; simply describe the facts of your inner experience.

Respond with intentional, value-based action by choosing a next step that reflects your core values and long-term priorities. Pray for guidance, and act deliberately, even if that means waiting. Do the next right thing.

Summary of Knowledge 3.5 Emotion

Emotions shape how you experience life, influence your decisions, and affect your relationships. When unmanaged, they create suffering. When understood and integrated, they become a source of wisdom and connection.

RULER[5]

The RULER method offers a powerful toolset for developing emotional intelligence, skills you can learn and improve over time. RULER stands for Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, and Regulate emotions.

Recognizing means noticing emotional cues in yourself and others, such as body language, tone, or inner sensations. It is the foundation of emotional intelligence.

Understanding means identifying what caused the emotion and what might result from it. Emotions are data—they carry messages about your needs, values, and environment.

Labeling helps you move beyond vague terms like "bad" or "upset" into more precise emotional vocabulary. A well-labeled emotion is easier to manage.

Expressing emotions is about doing so in healthy, appropriate ways. Bottling up or exploding with emotion both cause harm. Learning to share your emotional state clearly and constructively builds trust and connection.

Regulating emotions involves using tools like breathing, reframing, movement, or mindful distraction to manage intensity and duration. It does not mean suppressing emotion but guiding it skillfully.

RaDaR

RaDaR is a three-step method that gives you a structured way to handle strong emotion, turn reactivity into intention, and live with greater clarity and emotional balance.
Reflect: pause and tune in to what you are experiencing emotionally, physically, and mentally.
Describe: put your feelings and thoughts into words, either aloud, on paper, or in your mind.
Respond: act in a way that aligns with your values, your goals, and the situation.

---

[5] RULER is part of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's framework. For further reference, see "Permission to Feel", 2019, by Dr. Marc Brackett.

Summary of Knowledge 3.6 Spirit

Spiritual health is not measured by dogma or ritual, but by how you live, what you value, and connection to yourself, others, and something greater.

Spiritual Self-Assessment
I take care of my body with good habits and avoid bad habits.
I seek and speak the truth, which deepens my freedom and authenticity.
I practice daily mindfulness or prayer to connect with inner wisdom.
I face emotional pain and use it to guide my healing.
I stay curious and open to learning from all life experiences.
I feel connected to others and the world, not separate or alone.
I give my time, skills, and resources freely, knowing it enriches me.
I live with gratitude and find meaning even in pain.
I belong to a loving or spiritual community that supports me.
I enjoy my life and live it with ease and presence.
I know my purpose and live with intention.
I am not limited by my past and live from my spiritual nature.

4-7-8 Breathing
Inhale for four counts.
Hold for seven.
Exhale slowly for eight.
Repeat this rhythm to create calm and deepen spiritual focus. Pair it with tactile aids like finger-counting or prayer beads to enhance mindfulness.

The Serenity Prayer
God, grant me the serenity,
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power
and the Glory, forever,
Amen.

Summary of Knowledge 3.7 Relationships

You have three levels of relationships:

Higher Power

Your relationship with your Higher Power is sacred, personal, and uniquely yours. Do not let others define or control it. Question, refine, and protect it, for it forms the foundation of all your other relationships and guides your spiritual growth.

Yourself

ALL of your parts are trying to help you in some way.
Do not try to rid yourself of parts you do not like.
Accept, love, and nurture all of your parts.

Grounding: Find a quiet place where you can relax and focus inward. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and settle into the present moment. Stay calm, curious, and open to whatever arises.

Inner Dialogue: Ask yourself, "What part of me is feeling this way?" or recall a time you acted out. Gently invite that part to speak. Be patient and listen without judgment.

Visualize: Picture the part as its own being. Give it a name, voice, and look. Notice how it feels in your body and what it says or wants from you.

Dialogue: Talk to the part with kindness. Ask what it needs, what role it plays, and how it is trying to help. Just listen and learn from it.

Express: Let the part express itself fully. You can journal, draw, or speak for it. Give it room to be seen and heard.

Integration: Thank the part for sharing. Let it know you are listening. Consider how to support its needs in a healthy way going forward.

Others

I'm OK and you're OK. This is the healthiest position about relationships and it means that you feel good about yourself and others.

I'm OK and you're not OK. You feel good about yourself but you see others as damaged or less than yourself. This is usually not healthy.

I'm not OK and you're OK. In this position you see yourself as the weak partner in relationships. You will unconsciously accept abuse as OK.

I'm not OK and you're not OK. You believe you are in a terrible state and the rest of the world is as bad. Consequently, there is no hope for the future.

Summary of Knowledge 3.8 Finances

Financial health reflects your emotional life, self-discipline, and values. Through numbers, it demonstrates a relationship between yourself and the world. Money touches nearly every part of life: where you live, what you eat, and how you care for others. How you spend, save, earn, and give tells the truth of your priorities.

Financial wisdom comes from knowing the difference between needs, wants, and appearances. It requires trade-offs and delayed gratification. Impulse spending often masks emotional discomfort. Good financial choices are grounded in awareness and personal growth, not just math.

Culture sends mixed signals: one side praises wealth and luxury, the other warns against materialism. Comparing your finances to others creates anxiety. Instead, seek sufficiency, not excess. You need enough money to avoid misery. Beyond that, happiness does not increase.

Truths include: accept the cold math of money, live below your means, and track spending honestly. The best tool is a budget. It reveals where your money goes and what you really value. Budgeting is not difficult in theory, it is emotionally difficult in practice. Avoidance, shame, and anxiety block financial clarity.

Money is symbolic. It carries meaning far beyond its use. It reflects your hopes, fears, and beliefs. Building a healthy relationship with money helps you live with dignity and purpose. Spend with intention. Save first. Be honest about what each purchase costs in time and energy.

Create a practical budget that works for you. Use apps, spreadsheets, or paper, it does not matter, as long as you use it. Separate needs, wants, and savings. Try challenges like a no-spend day or week. Small savings repeated over time change your life. Build an emergency fund. Pay down debt. Know what you earn, what you owe, and what you own.

Do not be afraid to seek help. Finance is complicated, and advice from professionals may prevent major mistakes. Learn about taxes, insurance, debt, and investing. Diversify your savings. Avoid magical thinking. Money follows cause and effect.

Above all, keep perspective. Money is a tool, not your worth. Focus on your true priorities: health, love, contribution, and growth. Strive for "enough," not more.

You can be rich by having less desire, not just more income.

Wealth is not so much the summation of your assets as it is appreciating what is good, living by your values, and having a spiritual life.

Summary of Knowledge 3.9 Practice and Projects

Personal growth is important, but it is not the whole journey. You also need engagement, play, creativity, and connection. Self-development can become isolating if you forget to live fully. Before trying to improve yourself, make sure you are actually being yourself. A good life involves more than self-work, it includes being active in the world.

Projects and practices give shape to your talents, curiosity, and energy. They help you develop in ways that introspection cannot. Whether through music, movement, art, reading, or community, these activities awaken parts of you that are essential to wholeness. Growth also comes from dancing with life, not just analyzing it.

Start by reflecting on what makes you feel alive, peaceful, or inspired. What have you always wanted to try? Make a list of ten practices or projects that interest you. Choose two or three that fit your life right now, based on your time, resources, and energy. Set a clear intention for each. Ask why it matters to you.

Create a simple plan and schedule.

Begin small. Approach it with curiosity and low pressure. After a trial period, reflect: How did it feel? What did I learn? Do I want to continue or try something else?

The goal is not mastery. The goal is to stay flexible, open, and whole. Integrating a variety of practices keeps you grounded and responsive to life.

Do not treat this chapter as an afterthought. Practice and projects belong alongside every other area of self-knowledge. They bring balance, joy, and discovery, qualities vital to a good life.